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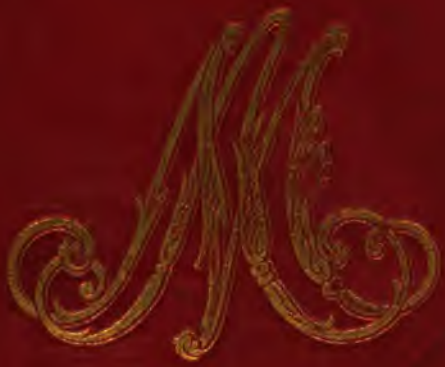

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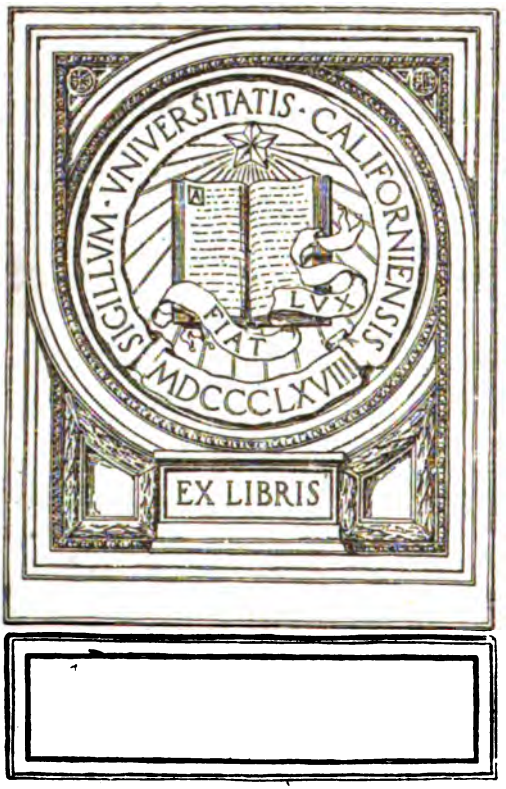

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MARIE-ANTOINETTE

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CHILDREN OF LOUIS XV.
By N. Bel (Belle) from Versailles. *Magniac Collection.*

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MARIE-ANTOINETTE

HER EARLY YOUTH

(1770-1774)

BY

LADY YOUNGHUSBAND

"... quand à notre petite, tout ira bien, pourvu qu'on ne la gâte pas."—The Chancellor, Prince Kaunitz, to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, Imperial Ambassador, May 27, 1770.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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TO

THE UNFADING MEMORY

OF A MISTY DAY IN WINTER

ON THE FAR BORDERLAND OF THE EMPIRE

273277

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PREFACE

It has been said that a preface is no addition to a good book and no apology for a bad one. Nevertheless, some explanation seems inevitable.

It cannot be too clearly understood that this work is not intended for those whose knowledge of the subject is as great as—or greater than—my own, but for the many who, taking a genuine interest in Marie-Antoinette and her surroundings, have neither leisure nor opportunity for seeking out and studying the best authorities.

No translations or adaptations from French and German into English have been employed; therefore the responsibility is clear. At the same time some indulgence may be asked should errors transpire of a kind which in first reading the work of another I could not fail to perceive—in view of the quantities of material to be collected, studied, compared, and often rejected altogether, and the care that has been taken to ensure accuracy in trifling details.

It was, I believe, about 1898 that permission was finally given by MM. Firmin-Didot of Paris, and by the representatives of the accomplished editors, to make a *précis* of, or to translate verbatim the three large volumes, with their valuable Introduction and Notes, which it had taken two erudite historians twelve years to piece together. Absence from Europe and those fountain-heads

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of information, to which continual reference should be made, delayed a project which was afterwards revived in its present form—embodying, as it does, the labours of many years. The main object was to unravel a nebulous, if highly attractive personality, and to replace by a human being the kind of lay figure which over-much indiscriminate reading had tended to produce. It is hoped that no charge of presumption for adding yet another contribution to this extensive branch of literature may be incurred. Eloquent pens have written themselves dry over the heroic aspects of history; the prominent figures of the past have been described from every point of view connected with the great events of the world; but, in the case of two at least of those with whom this work is mainly concerned, there have been fewer attempts to study what Monsieur de Nolhac calls "la vie intérieure encore si mal connue de la famille royale." With this object in view it became necessary to trace the most authentic records to their source, and to enquire closely into the qualifications of various writers before accepting their statements as final. The process proved even more illuminating than might have been supposed. One standard authority was found to have been writing from memory (and a bad one, too) twenty-five years after his papers were destroyed in a domiciliary visit; another was pronounced, by those whose veracity was generally conceded, to have been more remarkable for an overflowing imagination than for adhesion to any fact whatever; while yet another name was discovered to have been inscribed on an alluring title-page by a contemporary who eked out a precarious livelihood by the fabrication of the memoirs of those who had lost their heads in more senses than one.

It is hoped that the list of the principal

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authorities on which this work is based may satisfy those who take nothing for granted. The authenticity of the sources once established, there are many who, like myself, prefer to be assured that the work they are reading is founded on unimpeachable testimony—rather than on those violent personal opinions so often confused with matters of fact by authors combining strong prejudices with conspicuous facility of expression and ease of style. The object has been to translate letters and speeches as literally as the natures of the three languages concerned admit: to reproduce the characteristic expressions of the various writers instead of turning the whole into modern English—a proceeding which, when attempted by the same hand throughout, tends to extinguish individuality, and to produce a general effect which is both colourless and flat. It is hoped that the particulars given may enable those who care for the subject to form their own opinions. Where it seemed necessary, certain statements are coupled with the authority from whence they are derived; dates have been inscribed after careful investigation, and family trees have been shorn of few, if any, of their collateral branches. It is not impossible that this study may be read—as much of it was written—in far lands beyond the seas, where historical works are few and hard to obtain; and only personal experience can gauge the profound exasperation engendered in the enquiring mind under such conditions by an author who takes it for granted that one knows just what one does not, and is possessed by a strong and wholly futile desire to ascertain. Much, very much, has been left that might have been eliminated with advantage from the point of view of writing a book, on the principle that it is generally easy to skip what is regarded as superfluous or tiresome, while an even

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simpler remedy for a book that finds no favour in the eyes of those for whom it was intended will not fail to suggest itself to the intelligent reader.

Only the agreeable portions of a preface now remain; and having invoked no extraneous assistance in the matter of forming opinions and arriving at conclusions, it is a particularly pleasant task to acknowledge my indebtedness either for the loan of pictures, or for much-needed items of information to the following:—

To Count Mensdorff, for copies of two portraits of exceptional interest; to Comte and Comtesse de Pimodan, Marquis and Marquise de Lasteyrie, Comte Jacques de Pange, and Comte Emmanuel de Castéja; to Lord Home, who was good enough to authorise certain quotations from the "Journals of Lady Mary Coke," printed for private circulation; to Sir John Swinburne, of Capheaton; to Mr. Grey Butler and Colonel Collier; not forgetting my cousins, who lent one of Horace Walpole's letters on the Queen of France from the Orford-Ossory correspondence—a letter never before reproduced in facsimile, and one of the best known of the long series entirely in his own handwriting, before Thomas Kirkgate took up the pen.

Recognition of assistance given on many points relating to English phrasing and expression is restricted, by request, to a passing allusion. This help was all the more valuable to a tyro in the correction of proofs, unable to lay claim to any such extenuating circumstance as regards the highways and hedges, the bye-paths and side-tracks, of laborious historical research.

H. A. Y.

Buckingham Gate,
London, 1912.

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INTRODUCTION

A LARGE number of those whose tastes in after-life are destined to incline strongly in the direction of history would probably find that certain pictures are intimately connected with the indescribably vivid impressions of childhood.

My earliest recollections centre round some incongruous groups of well-known characters,—François Premier, preparing to caracol on a stout cream-coloured horse with an impossibly small head and a black mane and tail; a Dauphin, from Strawberry Hill, in a black doublet and a flat cap with a long white feather; two little children, both wearing the ribbon of the Saint-Esprit, sitting on the ground on the terrace at Versailles, the baby in a lace frock and cap holding the string attached to a King Charles spaniel, and with the other hand clutching the sleeve of a brother arrayed in stiff cloth-of-gold;[1] the tall figure of Henri de Guise, "le Balafré," in inlaid armour, with a map of a fortified town on a blue and gilt-fringed table; Sir Philip Sidney, life-size, in slashed hose, with mild brown eyes looking over a gigantic ruff; Mary, Queen of Scots, when Dauphine, with quantities of pearls and the earliest form of her pointed head-dress; William "the Silent," in armour, on the watch for his arch-enemy over the French border; and many more. Numbers of curious Janets, Holbeins, and

[1] The frontispiece to this volume is a reproduction of this picture.

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Cranachs came in time to be looked upon as intimate friends when their prim, severe countenances greeted our return to the old home that they and we left together. They were also objects of interest to sightseers, and of many strange tales by the regular cicerone—assisted, when numbers demanded, by an ancient house-steward, a great character, whose half-century connection with those he so faithfully served was only ended by death. To all the questions of my brothers and myself he invariably took refuge in the cryptic utterance, "The Archæological Society," adding strong recommendations to keep out of the way. But a learned Society suggested history, and on one occasion we waited a moment on a staircase, the balustrade of which in continuation formed two sides of a hollow square. In the ante-room below two voices rose above the din of conversation.

First female voice. "What odd-looking people! Who are they?"

Second female voice (*reading from a catalogue*). "Catherine de Medici and her four children—painted in 1561—ascribed to Janet."

First female voice. "Catherine de Medici? Who was she?"

Second female voice. "Oh, don't you remember? She was the mother of Anne Boleyn."

First female voice. "So she was; how one does forget one's history." And the voices dwindled happily away to a little room in the distance, where the divinely-inspired work of Léonard Limousin and Jean Courtois doubtless looked odder still.

At an age when the literary aspirations are chiefly restricted to "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass," I pored over the closely-printed pages of Mercy-Argenteau's reports to the Empress, and devoted to eluding the

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heated remonstrances and prohibitive measures of a conscientious German instructress of youth an amount of energy and dexterity which, otherwise directed, might have led to practical results.

It is sometimes stated that no historical personage—save one—has been so much written about as Marie-Antoinette. We know now probably all there is to know about her Trianons and her towering plumes—"too light," said the Emperor, "to support a crown"; her fatal friendships; her horror of ceremonial in private life, and her abortive, when not actively pernicious, incursions into the perilous field of volcanic political action. But what were the forces that impelled her *nolens volens* into that stormy arena, so foreign to her character and tastes; what were the details of an education scarcely begun when she left Vienna, and continued under inconceivable conditions during the critical years succeeding her arrival as the fourteen-year-old official bride of the heir to the French throne—of all this we knew little or nothing until Comte de Mercy-Argenteau lifted the curtain that veiled the scenes of her strange girlhood.

Into the question of the authenticity and worth of his reports it would be superfluous to enter here. Their immense value has been proved up to the hilt; and those who are by interest most hostile to his opinions and by conviction opposed to his conclusions have testified to his scrupulous accuracy, to his extensive information, and to the tenor of his evenly-balanced mind. The policy that underlay his official work generated no partizan spirit, and the devotion to the Empress-Queen, which constituted the motive power of his conduct as regarded her daughter, only betrayed itself in the tangible results of a remarkable loyalty. It is not surprising that the drawbacks insuperable from the anomaly of

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the tuition of the future Queen of one country remaining vested in the deft hands of a foreigner, the ambassador of another Power, should strike those who study her later history with any care. When the reproach of "l'Autrichienne" became the battle-cry of a hostile faction, it was easy to forget the innumerable dangers obviated by the sage counsels of the pilot who had helped a child in years and experience "to steer her barque in those troubled seas."[1] A qui la faute? Without complaining to the Sovereign for whose sake he undertook what she herself called such "hard and tiresome" work, Mercy owned how gladly he would have relegated his onerous functions to a king or a prince, to a queen or a princess, to a Comtesse de Noailles or a Duchesse de Chaulnes, had one come forward prepared to take responsibility and prove his or her fitness for a post which no one seemed qualified to fill.

For certain conscientious students, it is even more difficult to comprehend the attitude of those who profess to find justification for an unfavourable opinion of the daughter's character in the tone of the mother's letters. It would show elementary ignorance of the circumstances, amounting to a preference for preconceived opinions, to ignore either the frame of mind in which those letters were written or the standpoint of the writer. Maria Theresa's own attitude of uncompromising morality had produced situations of tension at her own Court; who was so little likely as she to ignore or minimize the enormous perils of her child's gilded isolation? The worst result—a possibility daily to be taken into account—of thrusting a young and lovely girl unprotected and practically uncontrolled into such a vicious atmosphere as Versailles, happily never came to pass.

[1] Prince Kaunitz.

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But that it existed no one could attempt to deny. The gall in which the ink at Schönbrunn or Laxenbourg was often mingled unquestionably owed its chief origin to the writer's conviction of the conditions of the Court of France, no less than to her profound mistrust, tinged by a contempt she could not always conceal in private, for the characters of Louis XV., his daughters, his grandchildren, and his friends. If strong speaking alone could keep a young girl straight where evil examples were never lacking, the Empress was determined to have no cause for self-reproach. Taking life *au grand serieux* herself, she had no patience with those who minimized obligations to which few were so keenly alive. That anybody belonging to her should fail—even in small things—was a matter of grief and dismay quite out of proportion to the offence, or to the responsibility involved.

She was the possessor of a manner of writing peculiarly her own. Any one who has taken the trouble to consult the "Correspondence of Maria Theresa with her Family and Friends" will recognize the unmistakable style of the philippics hurled at the devoted heads of the favourite Caroline at Naples, the turbulent Amélie in Parma, and also, when his mother thought it necessary, the amiable Ferdinand at Milan. Even the family Benjamin, whose *chétif* childhood and delicate youth preceded abnormal corpulence, failed to get off scot free. Starting on a Grand Tour, bereft of most of those illusions dear to the heart and the *amour propre* of eighteen, he found himself thus apostrophized: "Indifference is the source of all your wilful forgetfulness, of those *gauche* replies, of those common observations, giving you all the appearance of an *imbécile*; and that doleful demeanour can hardly inspire confidence in those who are interested in you."

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Had the position of the Archduke Maximilian been as important as that of his next sister, it is hard to say what expressions the Empress would have added to the sufficiently strong diatribes she addressed to that Comte Rosenberg who played such a confidential part in the Imperial family's private life. There is proof enough and to spare that had the Emperor remained Archduke Joseph, or even King of the Romans, he would have found himself the object of the most scorching form of all those maternal criticisms. It would be difficult, too, to relegate her to the category of unjust judges. She practised what she preached without counting the cost, and was herself too accustomed to taking risks to spare her children any of the pains and penalties of those who are born in the full glare of the purple. Harsh she was at times—almost to injustice; but the importance of the subject far outweighed any considerations as to how her letters read, especially when these concerned the misdemeanours of a third person. "It is in the nature of my children to consider themselves scolded directly they are given advice," and nobody was more dumbfounded than the Empress herself, when some opinion of hers escaped a despairing mentor, pulverizing the poor culprit and eliciting a faint and profoundly respectful protest. That any one could question, or feel injured by anything she had been at the pains of writing, would never occur to her. It was moreover a Spartan age. Less than a century earlier, Queen Anne's heir, the hope of England, was drilled and boxed into water on the brain and a premature grave, before any one apparently had the sense or humanity to interfere. The unfortunate Christian the Seventh of Denmark was ill-treated by his Governor, Count Reventlow, until the only lucid idea left in the poor boy's mind

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was a hope that in time his body might become petrified and invulnerable to blows.[1] "Yesterday's amusements," he remarked when dragged—protesting—apparently by the hair of his head to a fête, "considerably bored my Royal Highness." Those times cannot be judged by modern standards of thought. Now the pendulum has swung the other way, and a growing spirit of hooliganism testifies to the deficiencies of our system of State education.

The correspondence between the Empress and Comte de Mercy remains a human document of an engrossing nature. Little indeed can one writer have imagined the bare possibility of these secret reports ever being read outside the narrow circle of the select few whose access to the Sovereign's private papers was a matter of course. The situation has changed since 1770-80. The Austrian Low Countries exist no longer; alliances have been dissolved, treaties broken or wiped out; the greatest soldier the world has known swept the board and changed the face of Europe. Little indeed could one diplomatist with all his astuteness divine what a quarter of a century was destined to bring forth. His strenuous life of twenty-two years in the Austrian Embassy in Paris counts for comparatively little as a political factor to-day. For the ordinary public now our ambassador's chief claim to distinction may almost be said to lie in the voluminous reports which he undertook *con amore* over and above his ostensible work, and which from any other aspect he himself deprecated and despised. His allusions to these letters are couched in strong terms of detraction, coupled with apologies for their very existence: "I send another letter filled with miserable details" —"If only my letters were as interesting as they are long"—"I am indeed ashamed of my letters

[1] *Gustave III. et la Cour de France.*

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—*rempli de misères.*" Now, his fame is largely based on the interest he took in a little girl of fourteen.

For the details of Marie-Antoinette's career after 1780 we can rely on no such untainted source. There is one still living, who, if she could forget an old promise, could clear up many mysteries. Unfortunately the greater part of those who have spoken have done so from a standpoint to which they could lay no substantial claim. How many, as Baron de Besenval said, were actually in a position to penetrate beyond the antechambers of her palaces? One of her four head-dressers has left some valuable if rather overrated memoirs, written from memory thirty years after the events with which they treat. The writer, who was on her defence, was inspired by motives happily absent from those engrossing chronicles in which Fanny Burney detailed her experiences in the service of a very different Queen.

An intelligent fellow-countryman of Louis XVI. said not long ago: "You cannot really admire Marie-Antoinette; her letters to her mother show that she never told the truth." Few, I venture to think, have studied these letters more closely than I, and I consider that the facts quite fail to endorse this judgment. In all this enormous correspondence of Mercy with his Sovereign, her Chancellor, and her Private Secretaries, there is no single hint of any suspicion that Marie-Antoinette had the smallest tendency towards deceit. What reason could either the Ambassador or the Abbé have had for hiding that which it would have been fatal to their own interests to conceal? Those stern remonstrances, divorced from their context and persistently misquoted, were avowedly written by request, as the following pages will show. Every one

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recognizes the special risks of a private communication intended for one particular person falling into alien hands. No extenuating circumstance is even alluded to, no needful explanation hinted at, no reason given for apprehensions or suspicion, because the recipient is as well aware of them all as the writer can be. Maria Theresa's letters will always constitute a study in themselves—a performance as unique as her own outlook on life. "She had such a genius for government," said Lord Grantham, who knew her well in her youth, "that she seemed to regard her own father as the trustee of her dominions." Acute as her anxieties were, she was spared the grief of foreseeing the bare possibility that those secret outpourings of her own—her solitary relaxation—would be thrown broad-cast upon the world. Still less could she imagine that the day would come when those poignant sentences would be used to sharpen the steel of innumerable weapons aimed at one who was so sorely in need of the pity which was often, and, as I think, unreasonably, withheld. Nor must we lose sight of the fact that the very existence of these letters was due to the writer's inalienable conviction that they would be seen only by the very able, level-headed man to whom they were, with such immeasurable precautions, addressed; who, moreover knew both characters intimately, was aware of many circumstances that must now remain for ever unknown; and who—faithful, consistent, and clear-sighted—never failed in all his judgments and dealings to take into account the Empress's deep love for these children whom she upbraided for the follies of youth in terms only applicable to the sins of middle age.

Glancing over an English book recently I noticed with surprise the terms of a derogatory allusion to Maria Theresa. The momentary glance served to start a train of thought which recalled my recent

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translation of the words of one who devoted many years of a scholarly and cultivated existence to a study of one of the three foremost personalities of the eighteenth century.

"It is very curious," says the late Monsieur Geffroy, "to see in her the parent, the Christian, and the Sovereign. Her life-work, hard and difficult of accomplishment, was to weld together the scattered and divers elements composing the Austrian Empire as it exists to-day. The two remaining attributes of her character show her to have been superior to Catherine the Second of Russia, and to Frederick the Great. She had a noble and profound conviction of the obligations imposed by Sovereignty, at a period when other monarchs only recollected the exorbitant rights that supreme power permitted each to usurp."

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CHAPTER 1

THE ARRIVAL

"You journey past Meaux, and of course you think of Bossuet," says the author of an old novel,[1] much esteemed by three generations of a certain family. "You go bowling over the levels of Champagne, and look with curiosity on the succession of vineyards: and then you begin to ascend hill after hill, divided by the narrowest of valleys, which tell you that you are approaching the country of Alps. Firs of a dark blue-green fringe slopes which gradually change from slopes to steeps, and then you discover that you are in that department of France which was once itself a kingdom, and a very warlike kingdom. The inhabitants, some two hundred and odd years ago, preferred their own laws, customs and Princes, to those of their neighbours. But might made right, as it sometimes does now, and they became French, by the grace of Louis the Fourteenth's armies. They are quite amalgamated now,[2] though there still remains to them, as to the Scotch and Irish, an accent of their own. . . . Half of the town of Bar-le-Duc lies on the banks of the Ornain, a narrow sullen river, often almost as yellow as the Tiber. . . . Leaving the ville-basse, you wind up a steep ascent to the ville-haute, the

[1] *Once and Again*, by Mrs. Jenkin, vol. ii.

[2] This was written many years before the Franco-Prussian War.

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heart of the old capital of the Duchy of Lorraine. Here, grey and red mix in the buildings just as a painter would desire. Next to a clean-faced modern house you find a finely sculptured building, almost black with age. The Church of St. Etienne is there where it was in the days of Louis the Eleventh: some of the old city walls, with flowers springing from between every mouldering stone, show where once was the deep moat, and the protecting towers. Of these there were seventeen, all razed to the ground by the conqueror's orders, save one, the Tour de l'Horloge, which still, with its great white disc, stands as a landmark between the upper and lower town."

Over a hundred and fifty miles from Paris, buried in the recesses of the Duchy of Lorraine, Bar-le-Duc was, nevertheless, well known by repute to a considerable section of English people, two hundred years ago. It was a name dear to the Jacobites, for it was here that, for several years, Prince James held his Court of exiles, and here that he was joined by an important adherent whom he was afterwards so ill-advised as to alienate—that versatile genius, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.

The description above quoted, written about half a century ago from personal knowledge of the locality, gives a good idea of the scene which met the gaze of a young girl one spring evening in the year 1770, when an apparently interminable procession of travelling-carriages, escorted by a cavalry detachment of the Body-Guard of the King of France, halted beneath the ancient stronghold of the Dukes of Bar, the ruins of which to this day keep watch and ward over the entrance to Lorraine. The crowd, having assembled with the mysterious rapidity of its kind, gathered round a large berline emblazoned with the Royal arms,

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from which a number of persons, bareheaded, assisted the rapid descent of a very youthful traveller. An endless procession of vehicles of all sorts and sizes had conveyed an enormous army of attendants which was alone sufficient to attract attention. Lord and Lady Holland, returning to England after wintering at Nice, were detained at Avignon because every postmaster between that place and Lorraine had been ordered to contribute towards a supply of horses roughly estimated at ten thousand, which Lord Holland thought "ridiculous considering the distance."

It was only natural that the loyal burgesses should struggle and strain to catch a glimpse of the child—only fourteen, and in many respects young for her age—who was on her way from Vienna to Versailles. At Commercy, as the *Gazette de France* for June 28, 1770, informed its readers, "Mademoiselle Doublot, a fair child of ten, presented a bouquet and made a little speech to the descendant of a family [1] which, for nearly a thousand years, had never ceased to reign in the hearts of the Lorrainers." Moreover, the memory of the French grandmother of the recipient of all these attentions was still held in veneration throughout the Duchies, although Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans (Mademoiselle de Chartres),[2] widow of Duke Leopold, had been dead over twenty years. So highly was she esteemed that, during the long absences of her son after her husband's death, she was elected Regent—a title which her only brother had rendered odious in France. That son was

[1] For its history see Comte d'Haussonville's *Histoire de la Réunion de la Lorraine à la France.*

[2] Charlotte, only daughter of Philippe, Duc d'Orléans (brother of Louis XIV.), and his second wife, a Princess Palatine. Born at the Palais Royal, Sept. 3, 1676; married by proxy at Fontainebleau, and again on Oct. 25, 1698, at Bar, to Leopold, Duke of Lorraine, son of Prince Charles and Marie-Eléonore d'Autriche, daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand III.

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François,[1] last hereditary Duke of Lorraine and Bar: elected Grand-Duke of Tuscany, later Emperor and — greatest claim to distinction — husband of Maria Theresa. The centre of attraction on that May day was their ninth surviving child (out of a family of sixteen), already married by proxy at the Hofburg at Vienna, on the 19th of April, to Louis-Auguste, Duc de Berri, who had now become, by the death of his father and two little short-lived elder brothers — the Ducs de Bourgogne and d'Acquitaine — Dauphin of France and heir-apparent of his grandfather, Louis XV.

The bride was also fatherless. Many years later, when the storm-clouds had gathered thick and fast, Marie-Antoinette was strolling, almost for the last time, on a summer's evening in the park at Meudon, accompanied by her children and attended by Princesse de Tarente and the Marquise de Tourzel. Speaking to these two devoted friends of happy, far-off days in Austria, the Queen related the following little story. The Emperor, Francis I., was on the eve of departure for Florence, and his children were sent for to bid him good-bye. "I was the youngest of the sisters," continued the Queen; "my father took me on his knee and, with tears in his eyes, kissed me over and over again. He seemed greatly pained at leaving me: which surprised all those who were present." It was remembered long after, for there are many versions extant; the above was the one which Madame de Tourzel heard from the Queen herself. The Emperor started on his journey, but he

[1] François Etienne, born at Lunéville, Dec. 8, 1708; succeeded his father, March 27, 1729; signed the agreement for the cession of Lorraine to France, Oct. 3, 1735; married at Vienna, Oct. 12, 1736, to Archduchess Maria-Theresa, elder daughter of the Emperor Charles VI.; crowned Emperor at Frankfurt, Oct. 4, 1745; died, August, 1765.

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never reached Italy; he died at Innsbrück in 1765, leaving Maria Theresa inconsolable for his loss.

This marriage was the aim and object of a policy to which the Empress had long pledged herself. The little Archduchess, Marie-Antoinette Josephine Jeanne, born on the day of the great Lisbon earthquake in 1755, November 2, called in France "le jour des morts," was to be regarded as the outward visible sign of an alliance, the negotiations for which were in full train many years before her birth. Prudently ignoring the past failures of the Cabinet of Versailles to fulfil its most solemn pledges during Austria's long struggle with Frederick the Great for the possession of Silesia, ending with the disastrous Seven Years' War, Maria Theresa's instructions to her Ambassador in Paris, as far back as 1751, afford abundant proof of the importance which she now attached to the re-establishment of friendly relations with France.[1] That these instructions fell upon no deaf ears is a matter of certainty, for they were conveyed to an envoy who then, and for over forty years, controlled the destinies of the Empire—Count, afterwards Prince, Kaunitz. Received with enthusiasm by the Duc de Choiseul, and with as much of the same sensation as he was probably capable of feeling, by his master the Most Christian King, these mutual advances and political coquetries assumed a tangible shape as time went on, and in 1755 resulted in a highly mysterious conclave

[1] In a work of this nature it would be superfluous to make more than a passing allusion to the change of policy thus involved. In July, 1757, Mr. Keith applied for his passports to Count Kaunitz. The British Minister had "refused to believe the story of the Franco-Austrian Alliance until he should actually see the signature Maria-Theresa on the treaty" (*Life of Sir Robert Keith*, vol. i., p. 22, quoted in Cox's *History of the House of Austria*, vol. v.).

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at a little toy house called "Babiole" in Madame de Pompadour's garden, below the terrace of Bellevue — truly a strange *emplacement* for the opening scene in a drama destined to end with the Temple and the Place de la Révolution. At this discussion *à trois*, the King and Ministers were represented by the Abbé, afterwards Cardinal, de Bernis, and Imperial interests by Kaunitz's successor, Prince Starhemberg, who had asked the reigning favourite to grant him a private interview on a subject of the highest importance. Probably no compliment that could have been devised, would have further gratified Madame de Pompadour, or any task proved more congenial to that strange, cold, *macquereuse* temperament, which, as far as possible, subordinated every human feeling to an immeasurable ambition.

The secret, known only to six persons, was so well kept, that for several months it was not guessed at even by the members of the Corps Diplomatique, who, as we know, kept a minute and unswerving watch on one another's proceedings. But it may be taken for granted that, from this time or a little later, date the persistent reports, credited at certain European Courts, to the effect that the Empress in her zeal had addressed to Madame de Pompadour an autograph letter commencing "My dear friend" —some writers say "My dear cousin." No one was less likely than Maria Theresa to commit any such blunder; and, in fact, some years later, when evidently she had been told of these rumours by some busybody, she gave them an emphatic and unqualified denial. There is preserved, in the Royal Archives at Dresden, a communication dated 10th October, 1763, from the Empress to her cousin, the Electress of Saxony:[1]

[1] *Maria-Antonia, Churfürstin zu Sachsen*, by Herr C. H. Welier, vol. i., p. 144.

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You are mistaken if you think we ever had *des liaisons* with la Pompadour . . . a letter . . . or any intimacy . . . Our Ministers had to pay their court, as the others did . . . That channel would not have suited me.

The incongruous conjunction of the Empress-Queen and Jeanne Poisson occasioned a great deal of mirth in the immediate *entourage* of the King of Prussia, and the absurd name "Babiole" gave rise to a number of witticisms duly repeated to Maria Theresa. By that time, however, her object was practically attained; she was on the most promising terms with her worthy new ally; and, whatever the Empress might think, or whatever she might write or say in private to those among her faithful servants whose zeal and devotion were only increased by her confidence, she allowed no personal feelings of her own to intervene where her duty—as she conceived it—was in question.

The negotiations which resulted in the marriage extended over a very long period, and it was not until the future Dauphine was eleven years old that preliminary instructions were sent with the utmost secrecy to the Marquis de Durfort, French Ambassador at Vienna. The political manœuvres of the Duc de Choiseul and Madame de Pompadour fill many chapters of the memoirs and histories of that time; indeed a number of very interesting books have been devoted to the subject. But as a matter of common knowledge and fact most royal marriages over one hundred years ago were based on political considerations quite apart from any personal inclinations of those chiefly concerned. The marriage of King George the Third was the work of a very clever woman and a Minister of the Crown. The projects and ambition of the Princess Dowager and Lord Bute indisposed them to look with favour on any possible Queen of England possessed of those attributes which would

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be generally supposed to conduce to the establishment of ascendancy over the mind and heart of a husband of twenty-three. Princess Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz probably owed her unexpected elevation to the throne of a great kingdom as much to her want of striking attractions as to her family's insignificance in the balance of power in Europe.[1] Lady Sarah Lennox, who lived to demonstrate in extreme old age that charm can survive long after youth and beauty have fled for ever, was skilfully got rid of. It is probable that similar tactics had already been brought to bear on the situation when a wife for his heir was suggested by George the Second. Mr. Walpole, writing to his friend Richard Bentley in 1755, remarks that "her ladyship's" (the Princess Dowager) "eldest boy declares violently against being bewolfenbüttled," an explanation of which cryptic utterance is to be found in the *Memoirs of Lord Waldegrave* (page 39): "The Duchess of Wolfenbüttel, with her two unmarried daughters, waited on His Majesty at Hanover." The elder of the two Princesses, "having merit and understanding equal to her beauty," so charmed the old King that he told Lord Waldegrave "with great eagerness" that had he, the King, only "been twenty years younger she should never have been refused by a Prince of Wales, but should at once have been Queen of England." The Princess was so persistently misrepresented to the projected bridegroom of eighteen by the Leicester House faction that soon "his prejudice against her amounted to aversion itself."

Although the procedure adopted in connection

[1] There hangs in the Musée du Louvre a splendid *tableau d'apparat* —a portrait of Queen Charlotte. It is, if I remember rightly, by Gainsborough, and it is quite erroneously labelled "Princesse de Galles." The artist has cast over the features a kind of haze which in itself is the work of genius.

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with the marriage of Louis-Auguste and Marie-Antoinette was similar to that which had obtained on previous occasions—and notably on that of the nuptials, twenty-seven years before, of the late Dauphin with Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, when that Princess passed through Strasbourg on her way from Dresden—the ceremonial was now considerably amplified. It is not improbable that the King and the Duc de Choiseul wished to demonstrate the solidity of the Franco-Austrian alliance: be this as it may, it is clear that those who were responsible for the orders which were issued from the various Ministries in Paris were desirous of exhibiting their sense of the relative importance of the daughter of the Empress, and those of Stanislas Leszczynski and an Elector of Saxony, both—by a strange coincidence—successive Kings of Poland.

On the 3rd of May Comte de Noailles, invested with the title of Envoy-Extraordinary, arrived at Strasbourg. Philippe de Noailles, brother of the head of his great house, was at this time between fifty and sixty years of age, had combined a court life with a career of arms, had distinguished himself at Fontenoy, and, better known by his later title of Duc de Mouchy, attained the grade of a Marshal of France. Brusque in manner, of an irritable temperament and disliking society, the Comte de Noailles was an upright, high-minded man, and he and his wife (heiress of the old family of Arpajon) presented the rare and edifying spectacle of a really united couple, whose rank and wealth were utilized in the best possible manner. Great favourites with the King, who highly approved in others those domestic virtues which he daily outraged himself, the control of the household of the new Dauphine was vested in Monsieur and Madame de Noailles; and, had the

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latter been as tactful and clever as she was upright and well-intentioned, a wiser selection could hardly have been made. She, however, as we shall see, missed a great opportunity, and failed in her responsibilities to the lonely little foreign Princess who was entrusted to her care.

On the 5th May, Madame de Noailles with her only daughter, Marquise de Duras, and her brother-in-law, Comte de Tessé, First Equerry (whose father had filled a similar post in the service of Queen Marie Leszczynska), arrived at Strasbourg with the rest of the household. Two days later the Archduchess herself appeared on the banks of the Rhine, her large Austrian suite in charge of the Imperial Envoy-Extraordinary, George Adam, Prince Starhemberg, removed for the time being from his permanent post of chief Minister in the Low Countries, under the Governor-General, Prince Charles of Lorraine, brother of the late Emperor Francis. Prince Starhemberg had been chosen to escort his sovereign's daughter not only on account of the high esteem in which he was held by Maria Theresa, but also because of his intimate knowledge of the intricacies of the Court of Versailles, and the zeal and ability with which, when Ambassador in Paris, he had carried on the negotiations which finally led to the engagement of the Dauphin and the Archduchess.

"You have one great advantage," wrote the Empress in one of her first letters to her young daughter, "that Starhemberg will accompany you on the journey from Strasbourg to Compiègne. He is much liked in France; he is greatly attached to you. You can say everything, and rely on his advice. He will spend eight to ten days at Versailles, write to me quite openly through him (*par son canal*). . . ."

The formal handing-over of a foreign Princess

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by the officials of her own country to those of the scene of her married life must have been a peculiarly trying ceremony, although it was probably less painful to so youthful a bride as Marie-Antoinette than to one of more mature years. "At sixteen, one does not realise that one is staking the rest of one's life," as Madame de Boigne observes; and Marie-Antoinette was, as yet, two years off sixteen and childish for her age. What an excellent historical writer not unjustly calls "that inaccurate old gossip," Madame Campan, has embellished her widely-read memoirs[1] with a detailed description of this *remise*, so strangely worded in one particular that she makes herself responsible for the first of the countless libels of which the Archduchess became the victim, almost before she set her foot in France. Madame Campan—or rather Mademoiselle Genet, as she then was—was nowhere near at the time, and was not, moreover, ever present on any such occasion. Detailed descriptions of the ceremony have been given over and over again by eye-witnesses of the arrival of numerous Royal brides, among whom may be cited the mother of the three last Bourbon Kings — Marie-Josèphe de Saxe—and, nearer our own day, Princess Caroline of Naples (mother of the Duc de Bordeaux, the Dieudonné of the Royalists), recorded by the Duchesse de Gontaut in 1816, and differing in no respect from the ceremonial of the Old Monarchy. Madame Campan's information was probably derived from hearsay—as so much of the subject-matter of her memoirs, though reading like personal experience, unquestionably is.

Among the enormous suite which met the bride at Strasbourg was her librarian and assistant

[1] *Vie privée de Marie-Antoinette*, by Madame Campan, edited by Monsieur F. Barrière, vol. i., p. 70 (Firmin-Didot, Paris).

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private secretary. Nearer fifty than forty years of age, the future father-in-law of Mademoiselle Henriette Genet was prepossessing in appearance, and had the easy manners that are a not uncommon result of life at Court, where he had spent many years as one of four Grooms-of-the Chamber to the late Queen. It is sincerely to be hoped that neither his son's wife nor he himself was the least aware of the interpretation that would inevitably be placed by the malevolent on this strange description of a routine incident which one of them, at least, had never any opportunity of seeing. Although unfortunately far from free from the fashionable levity and prevailing laxity of tone in speech and manner, Monsieur Campan (whose real family name was Berthollet, and who belonged to a good old bourgeois family in the Béarn) was on the whole superior to many of his Court colleagues, and lived to show his unfortunate sovereign some marks of attachment. But before the dawn of these dark days he was fated to do his Queen a very grave injury in public estimation, the consequences of which followed her to the end of her days.

On an island in the middle of the Rhine, opposite Kehl, a wooden pavilion of five rooms had been erected, partially furnished, and hung with well-known tapestries from the Garde-Meuble in Paris. In the archives of the town of Strasbourg is still preserved a drawing which was prepared for, and sent for the inspection of, the Duc de Choiseul. It was returned by him with minute directions: a private letter of the day[1] proves what pains were taken to carry out his wishes:—

The Crown Upholsterer is here: he brought furniture and tapestry from the Garde-Meuble, and is being assisted by

[1] *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, by Comtesse d'Armaillé (*née* de Ségur), vol. i. (Perrin, Paris, 1893).

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the most expert workmen in the town. Cardinal de Rohan lends his own carpets to decorate the two ante-rooms, French and Austrian. The Lutheran University lends a daïs, and a state-chair, in crimson and gold; the Grand-Chapter a velvet carpet in the same colour; the Prince de Lorraine a cover for the principal table: other wealthy residents send chairs and stools ("tabourets et banquettes"). It is hoped that all will be ready towards the end of April. Meanwhile the *pavilion de remise* becomes the aim and object of sightseers. . . .

In the Austrian portion of the pavilion Marie-Antoinette was waited on—for almost the last time—by the faithful Austrian women who had known her all her life, and was attired in a complete outfit (even to her stockings) of new French clothes, in order that, according to inexorable etiquette (how she was destined to hate the word!) she should retain nothing which might remind her of the land of her birth. What a mere matter of form this was may be understood when it is recollected that, for the last year at least, all her toilettes had been sent from Paris.

Among the sightseers who flocked to inspect the temporary building was no less a personage than Goethe, then a young man of about twenty, who had come from his native Frankfurt-am-Main to study in Strasbourg. He has recorded his impressions in the following terms:—

> What interested me most—and will cost me money which I shall not grudge, in order to induce the Concierge to allow me to return—are the Gobelins tapestries with which the interior of the apartments is decorated. I then saw, for the first time, these famous tapestries, executed after the cartoons of Raphael. . . . I inspected these beautiful works of art several times without getting tired of them . . . but the subjects revolted me. These were nothing more or less than the history of Jason and Medæa. . . .

Goethe then goes on to say that certain religious subjects in the outer rooms appeared to him to be in doubtful taste, considering the occasion; but

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the inconceivable blunder that had been committed in the large reception-room put me beside myself. I appealed to my companions to endorse my opinion of such an offence against taste and common-sense. "What!" I cried, without concerning myself who heard me, "is it possible that when a young Queen enters her new dominions for the first time she should find, put before her very eyes, an example of the most horrible nuptials in existence? Is there no one among all the French architects and decorators who can comprehend that a picture . . . produces impressions, and suggests presentiments? Have they nothing more suitable to place before a young and charming Queen than these dreadful spectres?" I forget what else I said; my companions begged me to be silent, and took me away in order to avoid any disagreeable results. They assured me that no one amuses themselves by finding meanings in pictures, neither would any of the inhabitants of Strasbourg—still less a Queen and her Court—give the subject of them a second thought.

The above remarkable letter has been reproduced at length because it is one of the best authenticated instances of the endless omens which were cited after the terrible misfortunes of Marie-Antoinette had moved the civilized world to pity and indignation. Then, and for many years after, everybody recollected something which had aroused their suspicions that all was not precisely as it should be: only, unlike the immortal genius whose opinion has been quoted, these wiseacres mostly neglected to put their forebodings on record until after the event.

Even at the moment, as it proved, Goethe was right in his surmises, while his friends were altogether mistaken. Almost directly she entered the pavilion the Archduchess noticed the fatal pictures. "Oh!" she exclaimed to a German dresser, "what a bad omen!" "She cried a great deal," adds Mademoiselle de Waldner, who was presented to her next day, and who, belonging to an old and noble Alsatian family, and brought up

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with a young German princess[1] at Montbéliard, spoke French and German with equal facility.[2]

The folding doors were thrown open, and those who were waiting in the centre saloon beheld the entrance of a fair, young girl, with a very slender figure and remarkably brilliant colouring. Advancing slowly up the room, carrying her head high, and returning with dignity and grace the profound bows of all present, she advanced to the daïs and seated herself in an arm-chair — probably the identical crimson velvet-and-gold one previously alluded to. Messieurs Bouret and Gérard, the former one of the King's Cabinet Secretaries, and the latter First *Commis* for Foreign Affairs, presented the papers belonging to the "contract of exchange" for the signatures of the two Envoys, after which the Archduchess, with difficulty restraining her tears, took leave of a considerable number of her Austrian attendants, many of whom shed tears as they knelt to kiss the hand of their little Princess. Prince Starhemberg alone remained, standing on her right, while one of the King's Ushers of the Chamber opened the opposite doors to admit the French household two by two, Comte de Saulx escorting Comtesse de Noailles, who, taking the place of the Imperial Envoy, presented her husband by his full styles and titles, one of which—that of a Spanish Grandee—entitled him to the *baiser d'usage*, as placing him on a par with a duke, and *pair de France*. The

[1] Dorothea, daughter of Prince Frederick of Würtemberg, married to a sister of Frederick the Great. The prince was a Roman Catholic, but being in the service of Prussia brought up his children as Protestants in accordance with their uncle's wishes. The latter broke off the engagement of his eldest niece, who at seventeen was very tall and handsome, with the Hereditary Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, and in 1776 arranged her marriage with the Grand Duke Paul, six months after the death of his first wife. Princess Dorothea was baptized into the Greek Church as Marie-Féodorowna.

[2] *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, by Comtesse d'Armaillé.

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Archduchess is said to have descended hurriedly from her daïs in order to greet Monsieur and Madame de Noailles with great kindness and effusion, probably on account of the Empress's oft-repeated injunctions. Then followed the presentation of the Marquis de Grange, Master of the Ceremonies; the Chevalier de St. Sauveur, commanding the Escort; Maréchal de Contades, Governor of the Province, and many more; the ladies making their appearance last of all, and including the Duchesses de Villars and de Chaulnes, Comtesses de Mailly and de Tavannes, and so on, through a long list.

The deplorable condition of the finances of the kingdom, the huge debt which was about the only legacy left to it by John Law and the Regent, whose worthy pupil, the present King, had done his best to plunge it in further financial disaster, were apparently regarded as an incentive to fresh extravagance. The complimentary presents, which were strewn broadcast in great numbers, were of extraordinary magnificence even for that magnificent day. The first gift of the King to his grandson's bride was a large gold box of great value: this was entrusted to the care of Comte Valentin Esterhazy, with injunctions to place it in the hands of the Marquis de Durfort, the Ambassador, at the French Embassy. The First *Commis* had already left Paris for Vienna in order to assist in drawing up the settlements, and to witness the solemn ceremony at which the Archduchess signed the document, read aloud by Prince Kaunitz, by which she, and her heirs, resigned all right to the succession to the combined thrones of the Empress. Comte Valentin Esterhazy tells us that he all the more readily undertook the commission in that it obliged the French Foreign Office to defray the expenses of his journey, and

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the value of the gold box may be gauged when it is explained that seventy diamonds of great size and lustre, set in the lid, encircled a portrait of the Dauphin, by Hall[1]—"the Vandyck of miniature"—one of that triumvirate of Swedish artists whose work was so highly esteemed in France at the end of the eighteenth century. It is instructive to note that seven years later Hall was still begging to be paid for his picture.

The list that follows is far too long for reproduction here, although a few items from it may not be devoid of interest. Prince Starhemberg received a single-stone diamond ring of great value; Comte de Paar, a gold box with the King's portrait framed in diamonds; and Comtesse de Paar, a diamond "stomacher," composed of 1262 diamonds of varying sizes, in a green shagreen case mounted in silver. To the Austrian Cabinet Secretary, who signed the *remise*, was presented an oval gold snuff-box, enamelled in colours, with flowers and figures in relief, studded with diamonds, and with the King's portrait in the centre. Another snuff-box, square-shaped, was chased and engraved and enamelled after Vernet; and so on, through nearly a hundred boxes, rings, watches and diamond *aigrettes* to a series of *Kammerdienerin*—a bed-chamber woman receiving a watch and chain with diamond charms and engraved cornalines imitating cherries, the stalks and leaves in green enamel. The arrival of the bride at Versailles was the signal for a fresh outburst of generosity on the part of the King, who, it is to be feared, was much less particular about paying

[1] Pierre Adolphe Hall, born at Stockholm, 1736, and died at Liège, 1793. He painted in oils, pastels, and in miniature, and was an expert enameller. He was an associate of the French Academy, and appointed subsequently "Peintre du Roy." His pictures had a great vogue, and commanded high prices.

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for his presents than he was about ordering them, quite regardless of cost.

While the King appeared quite indifferent to such details as the payment of any one, Louis-Auguste had very strict notions on the subject. One of his tutors told a friend that Monsieur de Fontanieu presented himself to take his *congé* of the heir apparent.

"Where are you going?"

"To Lyon, Monseigneur, to look over the piece of furniture that His Majesty is having made for Madame the Dauphine."

"*A quoi bon?* Are there not plenty in the Garde-Meuble?"

The Dauphin wore remarkably plain coats, but a splendid garment was provided by order of the Duc de la Vauguyon for his pupil to wear at the marriage of the Duc de Chartres with his cousin, Mademoiselle de Penthièvre. Louis-Auguste glanced at the coat and ordered it to be kept for his own wedding, "as on that occasion only, he would have to be dressed up."[1]

From these lists we gather what an immense number of Austrian attendants followed the Archduchess on her long journey; yet how lonely she must have been, unaccompanied as she was by any relation or intimate friend.

Strasbourg was *en fête*, a triple salvo of artillery being fired, bells ringing, bands playing, crowds running to see the future Queen of France, when the carriage halted at the entrance to the city. The Chief Magistrate began to harangue the Archduchess in German, but was smilingly interrupted with, "Do not speak German, sir: from to-day I understand no language but French." An eye-witness, Mademoiselle de Waldner (afterwards Baronne d'Oberkirch), has written a descrip-

[1] *Un Médecin d'autrefois* (Theodore Tronchin).

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tion of the prevailing enthusiasm: oxen were roasted whole; rivulets of wine flowed through the streets; while much-needed bread—which no one in the excited multitudes troubled to pick up—was literally trodden under foot. Beneath a triumphal archway the Governor of the Province was standing, and at the Episcopal Palace, where the Archduchess was expected to sleep, the venerable Cardinal de Rohan, Bishop of Strasbourg, was awaiting his Royal guest's arrival. He was too infirm, however, to accompany her next day to the cathedral, where she was received by his nephew, a tall, distinguished-looking priest of thirty-six years of age, who was presented as Prince Louis de Rohan, and made a number of flowery compliments in the style of the day. Thus Marie-Antoinette first saw the man who was destined to play so sinister a part in her life.

Triumphal processions with allegorical figures, open-air plays and fairs, and an elaborate exhibition of fireworks went on until far into the night. In the evening was a ball at which twenty-four young girls, selected from among the noblest families in the country, were presented to the youthful bride, who charmed these damsels by making herself acquainted with their names, addressing an appropriate remark to each, and ending by presenting flowers from her bouquet to every one. Mademoiselle de Waldner gave her spray to the Princess with whom she had been educated, and who afterwards became Empress of Russia. Twelve years subsequently, Baroness d'Oberkirch found at Versailles a beautiful Queen, whose charming manners recalled those of the little Archduchess at Strasbourg. Writing of her first meeting with Marie-Antoinette, the Baroness observed, "At that time Madame the Dauphine was tall and well made, although

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a trifle too slight. She has changed very little since: it is always the same face — elongated and regular: an aquiline nose, pointed at the tip: high forehead, eyes blue and vivacious. Her very small mouth was already just a little disdainful in expression: she had the Austrian under-lip more pronounced than any member of her illustrious House. Nothing can describe the brilliancy of her complexion, the roses and lilies were deftly mingled. Her hair of a *blond cendré* had only a touch of powder. The poise of her head, her majestic figure, the elegance and grace of her whole person were as these are to-day. . . ."

Louis XV. was kept fully informed of the events of the journey: his secretary, Monsieur Bouret, proceeded to Paris with the papers relating to the contract of the exchange, while the Comte de Noailles despatched his eldest son, Prince de Poix, with a number of messages, much as, months previously, the impatience of the King to see the portrait of his grandson's bride had constrained his ambassador to hurry off the Comte de Lorge with the precious work of art, which it is to be hoped was less unlike the original than most of her portraits. It is improbable, however, that a small incident which took place near, or at, Châlons was ever related to the King. One of the most unsuitable of the many curious appointments to the household of the Dauphine was that of the Duchesse de Chaulnes—a lady of indifferent reputation, with whose strange sayings and stranger doings the memoirs of the time are replete, and who had at least the distinction of inspiring Madame du Deffand with a theme for two of her most admirable letters. It is thought it was Madame de Chaulnes who, presuming on the youth and inexperience of the bride, so far forgot what was due to the Archduchess and

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herself as to inquire, "Are you *very* anxious to see Monseigneur the Dauphin?" The reply, "delivered in a tone full of dignity," is sufficiently remarkable: "Madame, in five days we shall be at Versailles: on the sixth it will be less difficult for me to answer you." Then, by increased graciousness of manner, the speaker seemed to wish to obliterate the recollection of this well-deserved and well-administered rebuke.[1] The pity is that it was probably lost on Madame de Chaulnes, who, whatever else she may have been, was certainly not thin-skinned.

There are doubtless many who, like myself, can recollect a rather foolish little story that used to be told to children. Apparently founded on oral tradition, it has evidently been handed down, and can only be regarded as another instance of the persistency with which every speech making for unpopularity with the masses of the people has been attributed to Marie-Antoinette. She is supposed to have inquired of Madame de Noailles why the common people they met along the roads looked so miserable.

"Because they have no bread."

"Then why don't they eat cake?"

Now, however defective and superficial the education of the Imperial children may have been from certain points of view, they were one and all taught, both by precept and example, to interest themselves in the poor, as no child of a Bourbon King was ever permitted—far less encouraged—to do, until some years later when Marie-Antoinette herself started in her own family a system of personal charity which was regarded as not the least dangerous of her many innovations. The anecdote above related was probably founded on fact, as it was told twenty years before of Madame

[1] *Memoirs of Joseph Weber.*

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Sophie, who, although kind-hearted, was not overburdened with brains. In 1751, hearing how badly her brother the Dauphin and his wife (the parents of Louis XVI.) had been received by the people of Paris, who greeted the Royal visitors with groans and loud cries of "Bread," the Princess—among whose peculiarities was a great dislike of pie-crust—observed with tears in her eyes, "If only those poor people could bring themselves to eat pastry!" This identical story is also told by the Comte de Provence (afterwards Louis XVIII.), who is quite positive that the speech was made by his own great-great-grandmother, Queen Maria Theresa, wife of her first cousin Louis XIV., and daughter of Philip IV. of Spain. The speech was evidently a very ancient "chestnut" in the French Royal family; but, in spite of its having been told on the best authority of various members of it generations before the Hapsburg bride of Louis-Auguste was in existence, it is a curious fact, and one which impresses those who care to study these questions, how obstinately and for how many years it was fastened on to no other than Marie-Antoinette, who would probably have been the first to laugh at anything so unlike the patriarchal conditions of the Empress's household and family.

At Strasbourg the bride had been met by the Austrian Ambassador, Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, at Châlons by the Marquis de Chauvelin, Master of the King's Robes, and at Soissons by the Duc d'Aumont, First Gentleman of the Chamber. The former included in his account to his master a description of the visit of the Archduchess to Nancy, scene of the birth of the Emperor Francis, where, in compliance with the Empress's injunctions, the Dauphine visited the ancient burial-place of her father's family and spent some time in exemplary devotions,

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closely watched, no doubt, by innumerable pairs of respectfully admiring eyes.[1] Little as any one was likely to guess it, she herself, poor child, stood far more in need of those prayers than the dead and gone members of the House of Lorraine, sleeping so quietly beneath their great marble and alabaster sarcophagi; for her, the most unfortunate of their descendants, what an ending lay in store! But the bare existence of specks on an unclouded horizon was hardly guessed at, unless by the splendid personage who made his appearance some miles from Compiègne in the wake of Prince Starhemberg, by whom the newcomer was presented. This was one of the most prominent and brilliant figures of the eighteenth century, at this time the intimate friend of his sovereign—the chief promoter in France of the Franco-Austrian Alliance—Etienne-François, Comte de Stainville and Duc de Choiseul.

"I shall never forget, sir," said the Archduchess with her charming smile, "that it is you who have made my happiness."

"And that of France," replied the courtly Duke, bowing profoundly over the hand of his future Queen.

Early in May another foreign princess, then residing at the French Court, had received the following letter[2] from the Grand Master of the Ceremonies:—

Madame:—The King has commanded me to inform Your Serene Highness that he will repair to Compiègne on the thirteenth of this month, in order to go on the fourteenth, in advance of Madame the Dauphine, at some distance from

[1] The opposition of Madame de Noailles to the visit of the Dauphine to the Church of the Cordeliers was long remembered at Nancy, and was related there to Lady Mary Coke, who was much impressed by the affection of the Lorrainers for their former sovereigns, their joy at Marie-Antoinette's arrival, and their hopes of seeing the Emperor.

[2] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, by Monsieur de Nolhac.

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there, and to bring her back. . . . On the sixteenth will take place the ceremony of the marriage . . . to which the King has ordered me to invite you. . . .—I am, with profound respect, Madame, Your Serene Highness's etc., etc.

The recipient of this invitation was a young widow of about twenty years of age, Marie-Thérèse Louise de Savoie-Carignan, the third daughter of a Prince de Carignan, the descendants of whom, in default of the elder branch of the family, now occupy the throne of Italy. The Princess arrived in France in January, 1767, from her native Turin, and was married at seventeen to Louis-Alexandre de Bourbon, the only surviving and unworthy son of admirable parents. After fifteen months of an ill-assorted marriage, which proved childless—a time chiefly passed by the Prince de Lamballe in the green-rooms of the Paris theatres—the latter died before the age of twenty-one, when the excellent, charitable and universally-loved Duc de Penthièvre (after the death of the Comte d'Eu, the last remaining of the legitimized descendants of Louis XIV.), provided his daughter-in-law with a home in which nothing was left undone which might conduce to forgetfulness of the sorrows of her brief married life.

Among the other recipients of invitations to the wedding were various Princes of the Blood Royal, viz. the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres, the latter the only daughter of the Duc de Penthièvre, married the previous year—after much natural opposition on her father's part—to her cousin, the eldest son of the Duc d'Orléans, who was also present. Besides these there were the Prince de Condé, with his eldest son and daughter-in-law (daughter of the Duc d'Orléans), called Duc and Duchesse de Bourbon, and the Prince de Conti, with the Comte and Comtesse de la Marche.

On the morrow of the arrival of these and many

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other guests at Compiègne, the entire party set out at three o'clock in the afternoon for the Pont de Berne, on the outskirts of the forest—to this day a well-known meeting-place for hunting parties from neighbouring country seats. In the King's coach was the Dauphin, ill at ease in his gala dress, adorned with the blue ribbon of the Saint-Esprit, and the three elderly unmarried daughters of Louis XV., "Mesdames," as they were called—Adelaide, Victoire and Sophie. Next in order came the State carriages of the bridegroom's two brothers, Louis Comte de Provence and Charles Comte d'Artois, respectively one and two years younger than the Dauphin Louis-Auguste, who would himself not be sixteen until the following August. The long procession of State equipages, necessitated by the custom of each member of the Royal Family possessing a separate household composed of an indefinite number of attendants, was preceded and escorted by buglers, body-guards, musketeers, *gendarmes* and Light-Horse. The cause of all this tumult duly made her appearance at the bridge, and after various formalities had been gone through, during which she acquitted herself with credit of her share of the proceedings, including the achievement of falling at the King's feet, the whole party got into their carriages, Marie-Antoinette taking the place of the Princesses in that of her grandfather-in-law. With renewed noise the procession set forth on its return journey, to an accompaniment—as we cannot doubt—of discussions as to the bride's appearance, dress, manner, and every trivial remark she had made.

We can imagine the scene: the spring sunshine glinting through the magnificent oak trees that composed the Royal forest, on the crowds of spectators who had obtained permission to follow

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the State carriages, and the numbers on foot who had contrived to elude the vigilance of the gate-keepers and obtain admission to precincts which—like all else connected with the principal occupation of Bourbon Kings, the chase—were strictly preserved. Along the woodland road lumbered the huge coach, swaying on its gilded springs, too high for the staring crowd to get more than an occasional glimpse of a fair, girlish face smiling from the windows. In one corner Louis, the Well-beloved, leant back, watching the new arrival through half-closed eyes — glancing from her to the big, heavy, clumsy boy seated opposite, side by side with the Comtesse de Noailles — upright, prim, well-bred, a model of discretion and deportment. Alas, what a fate was reserved for three of the occupants of that carriage! Only the unworthy fourth, on whose shoulders rested a terrible responsibility, was destined to die peacefully in his bed.

Twenty-two years later, Marie-Antoinette took another eventful drive, the day on which she left France for the first and last time. Then the crowds were even larger. The streets of Paris, the windows, the very roofs of the houses were black with spectators gazing—at what? A common cart drawn by a Normandy white horse, driven at a walk by a man in a cotton blouse: inside, on a board, is a wooden chair, on which is seated a woman who has certainly never driven with her back turned to the coachman before. She wears a white jacket and a black skirt . . . a linen bonnet rests on her short, prematurely-whitened hair . . . her hands are tied behind her back so tightly that the delicate wrists are bruised . . . her sad gaze is fixed on the dim outlines of the palace which husband and child have left for ever. . . .

The exact Château de Compiègne of Marie-

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Antoinette's day, constructed by Gabriel for Louis XV., exists no longer: although it escaped the hand of the spoiler in the Revolution, its later associations, intimately connected with the Empire, quite eclipse those with which we are now occupied. Under its roof Marie-Antoinette spent the first few hours of her residence in those many palaces which she was scarcely to leave until the fatal move to the Assemblée Nationale. She was conducted to her apartments by the King and the Dauphin, where various members of the family were presented and "greeted, in spite of the King's presence," after which they all sat round the arm-chair of the Archduchess on *tabourets*—a kind of ornamental seat without a back, generally translated "foot-stools" in English books—apparently in solemn silence, happily broken by the stout Duc d'Orléans, who, by rising, gave the signal to go. What did the little Princess think of all this? The Imperial ambassador, watching her closely, reported to the Chancellor that her style of conversation and the expression of her countenance had surpassed his hopes: his chief fears now were centred on the possibility of the distaste that was so likely to be engendered in her mind by the "extreme ungracefulness of Monseigneur the Dauphin"—joined to the dangers of the snares of the *intriguants* who abounded at Court—but, he added, "she was already shewing him kindness and confidence, and he should do his utmost to help her." How nobly Florimond-Claude, Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, adhered to that resolution through the sunny and the stormy years that followed, we shall see further on.

That very same evening he wrote as follows to a Cabinet Secretary, Baron Neny—possibly the letter may have been intended to be shown to the Empress:—

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Compiègne, 14th May, 1770. . . . Our Archduchess-Dauphine in her début at Strasbourg surpassed all my hopes as much by the suitability of her expressions as by her demeanour ("maintien") in general. The interview this afternoon in the forest of Compiègne was the crowning point. It would be impossible to appear under more happy auspices than our Dauphine has done . . . We are again threatened with Madame du Barry at the supper of the Royal Family to-morrow at La Muette. I cannot believe it, but whatever happens our Dauphine will assuredly know how to keep her countenance. . . .

Did the Empress share any such happy conviction? There is a note almost of appeal running through the private letter which supplemented her official communication to Louis XV.:—

Monsieur my brother—It is my daughter or rather that of Your Majesty who will be so happy as to give you this: in losing so dear a child, my entire consolation consists in confiding her to so tender a father. May he consent to direct and command her: she has the best intentions, but at her age I may beg Y.M. to make allowances for certain giddiness: she desires that by her actions she may merit your goodness. I commend her once more, as the most precious link that can unite our dominions and houses. . . ."

As a matter of fact, the discerning Comte de Mercy was not so devoid of misgivings as he may have desired to appear. The year before he had written to Prince Kaunitz full of the subject of the newly-arrived du Barry: "I will not weary your Highness with the petty details of a horrid intrigue of which one cannot yet foresee all the effects. Those of the moment are sufficiently vexing, and I am truly pained by the thought that our Archduchess, future Dauphine, will have such a spectacle before her eyes." And again, after the supper in question had actually been disgraced by the presence of so undesirable a guest, he wrote to the Chancellor: "It seems inconceivable that the King should have chosen such a moment to

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grant to his favourite an honour which hitherto had been invariably refused." That was, however, precisely what Louis XV. had all along intended to do. He considered the wedding of his heir an excellent opportunity for imposing on the Royal family's privacy a woman who, by every unwritten law, every principle of decency, should have been excluded from the very purlieus of any palace. How could they possibly choose such a moment for showing the resentment which the King knew to be inevitable? Some of the best-informed French writers think that Marie-Antoinette's "proud sense of propriety" was revolted by this intrusion, but it is highly improbable that she realised a situation that had naturally been carefully hidden from her, and of which, indeed, she was unlikely to know anything. Her questions prove how innocent she was of any knowledge of the wickedness of the world into which she had been so suddenly cast. In the crowd of staring strangers she had not failed to notice a young woman whose appearance, in spite of the magnificent dress she wore, and the jewels with which she was loaded, struck the Archduchess as so odd and incongruous, that she asked:

"Who is that lady?"

"Her name is Madame du Barry," replied the lady-in-waiting, with an expression which only the word *pincé* adequately describes.

"Who is she? What does she do here?"

Shrugs and smiles and raised eyebrows were the only response.[1] Divining that something was

[1] Although it is quoted by Comte Fleury, I have not included another version attributing to the Duc d'Ayen an attempt to rescue Madame de Noailles from the embarrassing inquiries of the Archduchess by declaring that Madame du Barry was there "to amuse the King." The Duc d'Ayen was nephew by marriage of Madame de Noailles, and was famous for his jokes and *bon mots*, occasionally at the expense of his own father. It is probably what he would have said had the occasion been one on which he could have talked as he pleased.

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being kept from her, the Archduchess again directed her childish stare on the other, who was middle-sized, without dignity or grace, but possessed a plump figure and a pretty face, round and rosy, indicative of a certain good humour tempered by a great deal of silliness. She had dark chestnut hair,[1] only slightly tinged with powder, a good complexion and fine blue eyes, all joined to a remarkably common appearance. She talked with a provincial accent and a kind of lisp. Seeing the bride's gaze, one of the indiscreet persons who composed that lax society inquired what she thought of Madame du Barry.

"Charming," said the Archduchess briefly.[2]

Not the least considerable portion of the labours of the Envoy-Extraordinary while on special duty consisted in sending voluminous reports to the Empress, describing: (1) the *début* of the Dauphine, especially as regarded the King, the Dauphin, and the Royal family, as well as the Court and public in general; (2) the opposition to the appointment of the tutor, Vermond, who had accompanied the suite from Vienna; and (3) the details of Prince Starhemberg's *audience de congé* with the King and the Archduchess, with particulars of the earnest recommendations the Prince had made to the latter on the importance of devoting some hours daily to regular reading, and "some serious occupations."

The autograph instructions from the Empress, to which all this was a reply, having been addressed direct to the Prince, without reference to the actual ambassador, produced a state of affairs in which only Comte de Mercy's good sense and self-

[1] Madame du Barry evidently used some artificial means of making her hair lighter than nature intended it to be. Monsieur Lenôtre has recorded that an eye-witness who passed her on her way to the scaffold noticed that her hair was a very dark brown—nearly black.

[2] *Memoirs of Joseph Weber.*

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control averted strained relations between the pair :—

Monsieur de Starhemberg took possession of the letter of Madame the Dauphine to the Empress: he will doubtless forward it to Her Majesty with all the details he has not thought proper to communicate to me: barring this slight reservation, which is perhaps without purpose, I have every reason to congratulate myself on his proceedings, because in taking on himself all there is to do here, he has conformed to the tenour of the two instructions written in the Empress's own hand, one on all that regards Madame the Dauphine, the other on certain political questions, among others the Turkish War and that of the Jesuits: all worded in such a manner as to shew me that H.M.'s intentions was, for the moment, that I should not co-operate in the execution of her orders. However, M. le Prince de Starhemberg himself perceived the drawbacks of this mode of procedure and volunteered not to speak of political affairs with Monsieur de Choiseul unless I am present.[1]

Owing to these difficulties of etiquette, Comte de Mercy's reports to the Empress—simply invaluable to the student of history—only commence from the day following Prince Starhemberg's return to Brussels, June 8. The very explicit orders given by Maria Theresa to the latter complicated the work of the ambassador, who wrote to his chief, "I have left Monsieur de Starhemberg a free hand in what relates to the *début* of Madame the Dauphine in this country. He travelled with the Princess, and has taken on himself to render an account of what concerns her. . . ." Unluckily the letters of the Prince have not been added to the published collection of the splendid series of reports despatched from Paris between 1770 and 1780, with the utmost precision and regularity, by Comte de Mercy-Argenteau. The latter felt a slight amount of not incomprehensible irritation at the proceedings

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, May 26, 1770.

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of his colleague, but the arrangement was subsequently modified by the Empress herself, who expressed her regret in her own handwriting that her instructions to an Envoy-Extraordinary should have clashed with the duties of her ambassador.

On the evening of the 15th, the wedding-party reached La Muette, having made a considerable detour in order to visit St. Denys, and the youngest of the King's daughters, Madame Louise, who had only a month before exchanged the narrow if magnificent routine of Versailles for the austerities of a conventual existence at St. Denys, and had now commenced her probation, preliminary to joining a community of Carmelite nuns. That the Princess ever regretted the step she had taken we know was not the case: she once told her cousin, the Duchesse de Chartres, that the chief difficulty she experienced in accommodating herself to her new life was the necessity of descending, without assistance, a number of steep stone staircases. "I was so afraid of falling down what appeared to me a kind of precipice that, at first, I was obliged to sit on the top step, and drag myself downwards in that position." The fact was that the poor Princess, who was very short and slightly deformed, had been accustomed to make occasional impressive progresses down the gigantic marble staircase at Versailles, supported by one or more equerries.

The entire route from St. Denys to La Muette was lined with spectators: the true Parisian will take any amount of trouble to witness a procession or a performance, and there is no doubt that in 1770 the people were still sufficiently attached to the possession of a reigning family to exhibit the keen interest they took in the marriage of their future King to the daughter of one so well known

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and generally respected as the Empress was in France until her death. With great tact Marie-Antoinette affected to suppose that the hubbub was solely due to the natural anxiety of a prosperous and loyal people to welcome the Sovereign—a compliment which that estimable character received with civil complacency. It would be interesting and instructive to know—what was rarely discovered even by those among his contemporaries who were brought in closest personal contact with him—what his real opinions were. Worthless as he was, he was undoubtedly clever, and a reign already extending to over half a century could not well fail to furnish material enough and to spare for an enormous and invaluable experience of public events, and of the characters and abilities of the men who had been associated with his various Governments. No one knew better than Louis le Bien-aimé, long since, alas, become Louis le Bien-haïs,[1] how very little real pleasure the citizens of his "good town of Paris" derived from gazing on those well-known features, and it was, in truth, an occupation which he gave them scant opportunity for indulging: he had long avoided his capital on every possible pretext. Nineteen years before, on the occasion of the solemn Te Deum at Notre Dame in celebration of the birth of the then heir, the Duc de Bourgogne, the cold reception of the Royal Family by the huge crowds, and the King's air, "sad and serious," were universally remarked. One of Madame de Pompadour's household words had been, "Après nous —le déluge,"[2] and he himself had been accustomed to reply to the attempts of his confidant and Minister, the Duc de Choiseul, to rouse him from his Oriental Potentate slumbers: "The kingdom

[1] *Mémoires du Marquis d'Argenson*, vol. v., p. 371.
[2] This was frequently quoted afterwards by Prince Metternich.

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will last my time—*après*——" a shrug of the Royal shoulders, and an eloquent pause, completed the sentence.

The situation of La Muette in the Bois de Boulogne, and the neighbourhood of Passy, renders it—for it still exists—specially agreeable as a residence to those among its occupants whom business or pleasure takes to Paris. Constructed by "The Regent" for his favourite daughter, the Duchesse de Berri, whose evil character so strongly resembled his own, it was subsequently bought and not unfrequently occupied by Louis XV.; and included among those Crown properties which in 1787 were advertised for sale, it was finally parted with four years later.

After the supper-party, at which the King had so successfully introduced his new Roxalana to the members of his family, he departed with the remainder of his guests for Versailles, in high good humour, having previously presented a set of diamond ornaments to the Archduchess, who remained at La Muette with Comtesse de Noailles.

The midnight hours were employed by the wife of the retiring French Ambassador at Vienna in inditing the following effusion to an intimate friend, in the person of Comte de Mercy:—

"It is possible, Sir, that I may not have the honour of seeing you to-morrow; the crowds, the noise, and the spectators may easily prevent my speaking to you, and I am most anxious to tell you of the success of our charming Dauphine. The whole Royal Family rave about her; the King is enchanted with her, and did me the honour to tell me that he considers her far above her portraits; the Dauphin finds her charming: this is what is said and thought. I had the honour of seeing her quite near, and of following with deep attention every movement of this charming child, and I saw none which do not deserve encomiums: elegance, nobility, ease and dignity in her bearing; attentive and polite, I know no one capable of supporting a début

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with greater success. She is perfect with the King. . . . This evening when she was presented with her diamonds she fell upon his portrait in a bracelet, with which she replaced her own, showing infinite grace and feeling. She loses no opportunity of pleasing him, and must surely succeed in all she attempts. She has a charm in her manner which will turn all our heads. . . ."[1]

The Empress's first letter addressed to her daughter's ultimate destination must have arrived the day before the wedding:—

Madame, my dear daughter, you are now where Providence has decreed that you should live. If one only regards the great establishment you are the happiest of your sisters, and (indeed) of all princesses. You will find a tender father who will also be your friend, if you deserve it . . . it is this father, this friend, who consols and sustains me in my depression, and is my only consolation; I trust you will follow my advice and attend only to his orders and directions. Of the Dauphin I say nothing—you know my delicacy on that point: a woman is in subjection to her husband, and should have no will, no pleasure, but his. The only real happiness in this world is in a successful marriage—I speak from experience. All depends on the wife, whether she is pleasing, gentle and amusing.

As far as Güntzbourg,[2] whence I received the last news, there is but one opinion: every one speaks of your attentions and affability, and particularly of that sweet expression that appeals to all hearts. Avoid familiarity, which flatters no one, being too common: goodness is what attracts and reassures.

I recommend you, my dear child, to read over my paper on the 21st of every month. Pay attention I pray you to this: I most fear carelessness in your prayers and studies,

[1] This letter was found by Comte de Pimodan in the archives of his Château d'Ochain. He recently authorized its publication in *Les Portraits de Marie Antoinette*, Part 2.

[2] Güntzbourg is a small town in Bavaria at the junction of the Günz and the Danube. Princess Charlotte of Lorraine was then living there. Like all the members of the late Emperor's family, she was treated with great consideration by Maria Theresa, who, in looking over the itinerary of the journey, had directed that Marie-Antoinette should make the only halt of any duration (April 29 to May 2) at Güntzbourg, in order to see her aunt.

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coldness and negligence will soon follow. . . . Suffer no *tracasserie*: you are in a position to silence people, or at least to avoid or leave them. If you value your peace of mind avoid this from the outset, for this is what I specially fear, knowing your curiosity.

You will give this letter to the King . . . you can never say enough of my sentiments for him. You will also give this letter to Madame Adelaide. . . . I trust you will merit their friendship. The Choiseuls should know I have told you to single them out: do not forget the Durforts and the Abbé Vermond. Do not either forget a parent who will not cease until her last hour to think of you. I send you my blessing, and am ever your faithful mother.

The wedding-day, the sixteenth of May—the month in which another Dauphine, another celebrated and unhappy Queen Mary, allied to the House of Lorraine, was also married—dawned brightly enough, and at ten o'clock on a Spring morning the bride's carriages wheeled in at the great iron-and-gilt gates, through the fore-court of the Palace, and entering some more gates, now removed and replaced by a statue of Louis XIV., drove into the Royal Court and drew up at the entrance to the Queen's, or principal, staircase.

The borough of Versailles, occupying much the same position with regard to Paris as Windsor does to London, is, however, only twelve miles distant from the French capital and, depending mainly on the Court, covered an area disproportionate to its population. The genius of Mansard and the boundless egotism of Louis XIV. are mainly responsible for its Palace—probably the finest Royal residence in the world. Immeasurably inferior in situation to Windsor, in beauty to Fontainebleau, and in simplicity to Schönbrunn, Versailles was considered by some to surpass them all in general effect. It is approached by three broad avenues which converge star-wise from the huge Place d'Armes, faced by the Grand and the Little Stables, where two

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thousand five hundred horses were kept in the days of the Old Monarchy, long before these buildings were transformed into the barracks of to-day.

The first point that strikes the chance visitor to Versailles is its size: it might have been constructed for a race of giants, but as a matter of fact—cut about, badly added to, mutilated, shorn of its old-time splendour from certain points of view — it is the tangible, irrefutable evidence of the opinion that one rather small, inordinately vain man held of himself. It is Louis XIV. in his own eyes, not as others saw him: the tribute he paid to the Divine Right of Kings embodied in his own person. To observe that its principal frontage exceeds a quarter of a mile, and that it was reckoned to be capable, with its dependencies, of accommodating over 10,000 souls, gives a very inadequate idea of the effect which it is calculated to produce on those who see it for the first time. Lord Macaulay must have been in an unwonted ill-humour when he called it "a vast heap of littleness"; added to which the winter is not the time to see it, when Lenôtre's magnificent gardens may be covered with snow.

The "Queen's rooms" on the first floor, indissolubly bound up with the dramatic incidents of Marie-Antoinette's nineteen years' residence within the palace walls, were under alteration for some considerable time after her arrival. A small set of apartments had been prepared for her on the *rez-de-chaussée*, with an entrance on the left at the foot of the great staircase. Little now remains of the original decoration of these rooms, executed for the late Dauphine—who died in 1767—by such artists as Berain, Maurisant and Étienne Martin. The apartments consisted of two ante-chambers, a large cabinet or library, two smaller sitting-rooms, an oratory, a bed-room and a bath-room. All these

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rooms were beautifully done up with the carved *boiseries* of the time: the prettiest of all was the small salon, or boudoir as it would now be called, with white walls, the decorations in relief painted a peculiar shade of green, and "varnished," *i.e.* probably lacquered, by a very costly process copied from oriental pieces of furniture which at this time were the newest fashion in France. In the days of the late Dauphine some particularly good china, "Saxe," sent from Dresden by the Elector, adorned the mantelpieces and (accidentally) reproduced the white and green of the decorations. What is not unjustly described by a distinguished contemporary author[1] as the "bad taste and vandalism of Louis-Philippe" was responsible for the partial disappearance of these rooms, which have been swept into the modern museum. Deplorable as the destruction its creation entailed cannot fail to be in the eyes of those who seek for the scenes of the Old Monarchy, it probably had the result of saving Versailles from the fate which ultimately overtook St. Cloud.

Almost immediately on Marie-Antoinette's arrival the King appeared, bringing the youngest members of the family to introduce to their sister-in-law, by whom they were greeted with every manifestation of pleasure. The orphan sisters of the Dauphin were aged respectively eleven and five: the elder, Princess Clothilde—afterwards Princess of Piedmont and later Queen of Sardinia—is chiefly associated in one's mind with Drouais' beautiful picture, now in the Louvre, of herself and her brother, the Comte d'Artois, playing with a goat. The younger sister, Princess Elisabeth, eventually developed a saintly character, and was fated to part in circumstances of unbelievable tragedy from the bride and bridegroom of to-day.

[1] Monsieur Casimir Stryienski.

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At one o'clock the procession started from the real centre point of the State apartments—the room known as the King's, or Cabinet of the Council, dating in its existing state from 1755; where, on a huge table covered with a green velvet cloth, the Sovereign's work with his various Ministers was daily carried on. The ornamented wooden panels of this room are a *chef-d'œuvre* of Rousseau, and are worthily supplemented by carved and gilt mirrors, and by the ormolu ornaments of a red marble mantelpiece facing the door leading to the inner cabinets, *i.e.* private apartments. In these latter rooms now hang Nattier's beautiful, if somewhat idealised, portraits of Louis XV.'s daughters, originally painted for the Château de Choisy, of which beautiful building, alas! not a vestige remains.

In the Cabinet of the Council presentations took place, and hence radiated those endless staircases, corridors, ante-chambers, halls, salons and suites of rooms—little and big—which lend probability to the statement that it was easy to walk some miles in the interior of the palace without going a second time over the same ground. The Master of the Ceremonies marched just before the bride and bridegroom, the pages carrying the train being followed by the Comtesse de Noailles. Then came the Princes of the Blood, with their respective suites, and the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois preceding their grandfather, behind whom walked Princess Clothilde slightly in advance of her three aunts, the other Princesses and seventy Court ladies coming last. The vast gardens and park were black with people, who could hear bands play and see Guards of Honour form up, while the waters of the fountains sparkled in the spring sunshine. It was said that Paris was deserted. Several thousand spectators, the best-dressed being carefully placed

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in the front rows, were admitted by ticket to the interior of the buildings. Thus the upper and middle classes, who did not belong to the inner circles of the Court itself, had their first opportunity of seeing one who was, in after years, to be the theme of more discussion, more fervent praise and, alas! more indiscriminate blame than has fallen to the lot of mortal woman before or since.

Those who are familiar with portraits of the third Duke of Grafton will recognise a certain likeness to Louis XVI., although the Dauphin was taller, fairer, and had better features than the object of Junius' special animadversions. Covered with jewels and orders, and encumbered by the splendid full dress of the Saint-Esprit—a kind of cloth-of-gold—the bridegroom of fifteen, who always held himself badly and had an unfortunate Bourbon tendency to shuffle his feet, walked even worse than usual—probably oppressed by the occasion and his own shyness, and the difficulty he experienced in recognising faces at any distance, owing to his short sight. Beside him, with her hand in his, moved the bride—"she glided rather than walked" says an eye-witness—in her white brocade dress, her fair hair only touched with powder, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, her charming smiles responding to the profound bows and curtsies of her future subjects. Those who denied Marie-Antoinette's claims to regular beauty, who were—or professed to be—impervious to her extreme charm, who were most strongly prejudiced against her, never attempted to question her unexampled grace. Above middle height—she grew considerably after her arrival in France—she appeared taller than she was by reason of the manner, peculiar to herself, in which she carried an admirably-poised head. She possessed the movements which are the result of perfect

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proportions, and which are a never-failing source of artistic satisfaction to watch. No other woman in Europe bowed or walked as Marie-Antoinette did, from the cradle to the scaffold.

The procession slowly filed through the looking-glass door of the Council chamber, down the *Galerie des Glaces*—250 feet long—through the first Caffieri doors of carved and gilt wood, dividing those eight halls or saloons, with their painted ceilings, glittering with gilding, silver chandeliers and branches for lights, and hung with tapestry of which one piece alone to-day fetches thousands of pounds—the splendid *mise-en-scène* of "le Roi Soleil's" daily pageants, culminating in the crowning-point of scenic effect, the dazzling simplicity of the white marble and gold entrance-hall to the chapel. The chapel at Versailles—really a very large and splendid church—is a two-storied building, the work of Mansard and his brother-in-law and successor, Robert de Cotte: it was finished only five years before it became the scene of the funeral service of its originator, Louis XIV. To the accompaniment of the pealing of the great organ, as the congregation rose to its feet, the wedding procession made its appearance: no doubt the scene differed very little from that of which the prints of Cochin, on the occasion of the marriage of the late Dauphin with Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, give so good an idea. The place of the old Cardinal de Rohan, who was too ill to be present, was taken by the Archbishop of Rheims, Grand Almoner of France (Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon) who, surrounded by bishops and priests, performed the ceremony, and blessed the wedding-rings,[1]

[1] Strange vicissitudes were in store for these two rings. The Queen's was stolen from her for several years, and restored through a priest to whom it was given on a death-bed under seal of confession. The King sent his ring to Marie-Antoinette on the evening before their parting, and she managed to get it conveyed by means of one of the

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the work of the celebrated Roettiers.[1] The Duchess of Northumberland, who was present, said that the Dauphin was shyer than his bride, and "coloured up to his hair when he gave her the ring; he was dressed in the robes of the Order, and looked very well." The canopy of silver brocade was held over the newly-married pair by the Bishop of Senlis, First Almoner to the King, and by the Bishop of Chartres, Almoner to the Dauphin, and at the conclusion of the service the Grand Almoner presented the register for the various signatures. Monsieur de Nolhac has reproduced this interesting page in facsimile—one is struck by the characterless nature of the handwritings; those of the King and Madame Adelaide are the least insignificant. The bride's is in a small, unformed hand, with a large blot over her third name, Josèphe; and "Louis-Auguste" is a meaningless niggle. The page ends with the Grand Almoner himself, and what Monsieur de Nolhac calls the "humble curé," who appears to have been too much agitated by the proceedings to write legibly.[2]

When the cortège left the chapel, the Dauphin walked "in his place" immediately before the King; while the bride, which reads oddly, "followed just behind." Then the small army of Swiss, in charge of the apartments, proceeded to clear out all the visitors, in order to prepare the palace for fresh functions, while the bride—who it is to be hoped also obtained some food and a rest—received visits of ceremonious congratula-

few faithful friends she had left to the Comte d'Artois, afterwards Charles X. If the Queen's ring was still on her hand when she was murdered, it was undoubtedly stolen for the second time.

[1] Jacques Roettiers (1707-1784) was goldsmith to the King, and resided in the Louvre. He was appointed Engraver to the Academy in 1773.

[2] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, by Monsieur de Nolhac, p. 104 (Calmann Levy, Paris).

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tion from her entire household, several members of that of the King, and certain of the Corps Diplomatique distinguished from the rest as being *Ambassadeurs de Famille, i.e.* those of Spain, Parma and Naples.

Mercifully for the patience of so young a bride, the visits were followed by the appearance of the Duc d'Aumont, bringing, on behalf of his master, a small gold key, with which he requested Her Royal and Imperial Highness graciously to open a coffer[1] which, by the King's orders, had been previously placed in her bed-room. This proved to be a jewel casket, 6 feet in length and 3½ feet high, covered in crimson velvet and divided into five panels or compartments, magnificently embroidered in gold. The carved decorations were by Bocciardi, and the cabinet-maker Evalde had made the actual casket, the mounts of which were by Gouthière. The contents of the *corbeille* were distributed by the Dauphine among her suite, and consisted of snuff-boxes, fans, watches, gold and enamelled etuis, patch-boxes, scissors, scent-bottles and articles of jewellery. The jewel-casket also contained fans for the Dauphine's personal use, the handsomest of which was set with emeralds and diamonds, and a watch and chain also garnished with diamonds. Besides these there was a gold box, with the Dauphine's monogram in precious stones, the whole worth a large sum; in addition to which the King presented his new grand-daughter with the diamonds and pearls worn by the mother of the Dauphin, and with a necklace[2] of huge

[1] *Le Livre des Collectionneurs* (Paris, 1885).

[2] This splendid pearl necklace is now in the Louvre. It was voluntarily offered by Marie-Antoinette, after 1790, to the Commissioners of the Assemblée Nationale, when the latter came to the Tuileries on the unenviable errand of requesting their Sovereign to hand over the Crown jewels. The Queen was determined, in spite

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pearls of immense value, brought to France by Queen Anne "of Austria," mother of Louis XIV., and left by her to future Queens and Dauphines. Marie-Antoinette also possessed a number of jewels of her own, unlike the late Queen, who brought nothing remarkable on her marriage with Louis XV.

Again we must depend on an engraving after Cochin in order to form an idea of the scene in the Grand Gallery on the evening of the 16th May, 1770. The King's public card games commenced at six o'clock. A thunder-storm which broke out in the afternoon was now over, and a few gleams of the setting sun turned the tall windows red and gold, illuminating the decorations, the garlands of flowers hung from the branch-lights—specially borrowed from the *Garde-Meuble*—the splendid dresses and the powdered heads. Entering by the Salle de la Guerre, the crowd moved slowly along, behind the gilt railings, past the preparations for the rather dreary game of cavagnol, where, further along, the King sat at a large table, the Dauphine placed at his right hand, watching him play lansquenet. It was two years since the rooms of the late Queen, the long-suffering Marie Leszczynska, had been draped in black, at her death; these were now lighted up and thrown open, as a means of exit. The Duc d'Aumont had distributed no less than 6000 tickets of admission to the interior of Versailles—*billets d'appartements*, as these were termed—and when the rain

of requests to the contrary from those who were acquainted with the circumstances, to include these pearls amongst the collection of ornaments. Possibly no one supposed they would be accepted—it was difficult to imagine anything of the kind. And, as a matter of fact, these Commissioners would have had considerable difficulty in proving their title in any Court of Law to the possession of pearls which were the personal, if not exactly the private property of a foreign princess—another "Autrichienne"—which were not bought with French money, and which were left specifically by their legal owner and in perpetuity to future Queens and wives of heirs-apparent.

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came down in torrents the unfortunate people, closely supervised by the Swiss, had to take refuge where they could.

At half-past nine the King gave the order to postpone the illuminations, and the Royal family proceeded to the new opera-house, only just completed, for the ceremonial of the "grand couvert," *i.e.* the state supper in public. To reach this the Court had to follow a long stone corridor from which, before the Revolution, suites of rooms opened with windows overlooking the gardens. All this is now occupied by the museum, but the great Opera Hall, a masterpiece of Gabriel, built between 1753 and 1770, still exists, although it has been shorn of much of its ancient glory since it was occupied by the National Assembly of 1871. Among other acts of vandalism, the artistic green walls — in a colour called in France *vert-antique*—have been repainted a kind of reddish brown.

The gala performance in the new opera-house must have tried the patience of the Dauphine, for, owing to the delays of architects and workmen, it was by no means the success that its cost rendered probable. The scene-shifters could not manage the new and enormous scenery, and time had admitted of only three rehearsals. Although the part of Andromeda was played by Sophie Arnould herself, the old opera of *Persée* was ill-chosen, and injudiciously cut down and altered to suit the occasion.[1] "Madame la Dauphine appeared not to like it," says an eye-witness,[2] and the mortified *Intendant des Menus Plaisirs* notes in his journal, "it is true that this is a very serious Opera to one who is not accustomed to plays, and who does not like music." But, as a matter of fact, Marie-

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, p. 112.
[2] *Journal de Papillon de la Ferté*, p. 274.

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Antoinette was very musical indeed, and, as Monsieur de Nolhac justly remarks, "to prefer Glück and Mozart to Messieurs Dauvergne and Francœur can hardly be described as not liking music." Possibly, however, the deficiencies of the performance were forgotten at the commencement of the ballet, and the Royal family witnessed its unrivalled beauty from behind their gilt railings, from their boxes lined with watered silk, and covered with gilding to an extent which produced from a distance the effect of a blaze of jewels.[1] The men were Vestris, Gardel and d'Auberval, and among the female artistes were Mdlles. La Prairie, Dervieux and Guimard. Notrelle, "wig-maker in ordinary to the Menus-Plaisirs," sent in an even more formidable bill than was usually the case after a command performance, for wigs, beards and buckles, a hundred pots of *rouge fin*, and similar items. In the lists of the names of those who appeared in the opera is that of "Mademoiselle Rosalie," recalling the career of a woman who, without conspicuous beauty, and incompetent to dispute the palm of talent with a Sophie Arnould or a Marie-Madeleine Guimard, attained a lasting, if evil, celebrity equal to either.

"What do you think of my fêtes?" inquired the King, about this time, of the Abbé Terray.

"Sir—*impayables*," was the witty reply of that most corrupt of Comptrollers-General.

The construction of the new opera-house, said to be one of the finest in existence, necessitated the removal of several very important portions of Louis XIV.'s buildings, including, unfortunately, the gigantic staircase of the Ambassadors. But it would be difficult to imagine a more splendid theatre for ceremonial, with its ceiling by Dumareau, its

[1] *Souvenirs d'un Page*, pp. 220-221.

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carvings by Pajou, with dull gold (*or mat*) decorations, and hangings of blue velvet and damask fringed with silver. The galleries and boxes were filled by the *personnel* of the Court; and, separated from the crowd by a marble balustrade, the Royal family, twenty-two in number, sat for no less than two hours and a half at a table loaded with gold plate, waited on by countless servants who passed backwards and forwards to rooms hidden from view by blue and silver *portières*. The doors leading to a similarly decorated music-room were open, and beneath an archway surmounted by the interlaced monograms of the bride and bridegroom, the private orchestra, conducted by Monsieur Rebel—Superintendent of the King's Music—performed a "selection." Nineteen years later, hardly one week before Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI. left Versailles for the last time, the same opera-house was the scene of another supper, to which subsequent events added a gloomy and melancholy celebrity.

The apparently interminable wedding-festivities finished with that barbarous survival of the customs of the Middle Ages, *le coucher*, during which the Dauphin looked no less absent-minded and bored than he had done, to the earlier amazement of everybody (including the Dauphine herself), all through this long and eventful day. After all he was only a half-educated and backward boy—as he proved by inscribing in his journal the one word "nothing"—a reference to his having been kept away from his favourite pursuit, *i.e.* shooting, which seems at this time to have been about all he thought of.

There was not sufficient analogy between the ceremony of to-day to recall to the King, and those spectators of both marriages who were still alive, his own far-off wedding-day—nearly half a

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century ago. That summer was one of the rainiest on record: it took over thirty horses to extricate the coach containing the Queen (married in April at Strasbourg to the Duc d'Orléans as proxy) from the mire, and the cortège arrived several hours late at Fontainebleau, smothered in mud. Here on a September morning the rather strangely assorted couple met in the King's cabinet: she broad of figure, high-shouldered, with her strong sensible face, looking every day of her twenty-three years in her purple velvet *manteau de cour*, lined and trimmed with ermine, as she crossed the Gallery of François Premier between a double row of Swiss Guards, and descended the staircase to the chapel, with her hand in that of the "handsomest boy in France." Poor Louis-Auguste may have suffered from the comparison, but all the same in essential points his character was as excellent as his grandfather's was precisely the reverse.

In this huge Court conflicting interests were continually brought into direct opposition; the very air was alive with intrigue, and the tone more lax than we can adequately picture to ourselves at the present day. The virtual head of this society was, of course, the King, and had he been quite other than he actually was, there was, in fact, nobody to second any efforts which he might have made, but which were never attempted, to preserve order and certain forms of decorum.

The inevitable visits and presentations strengthened the good impression which the Dauphine had already made, for she maintained her equanimity all through the tedious ceremonial of the day following, addressing some appropriate remark to each newcomer in turn. It was not the same in the case of those who came to pay their respects on State occasions. The small rooms of the *rez-*

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de-chaussée,[1] with their narrow stairs, were unsuited to the long trains, the overflowing paniers, and the feathers and lappets (*barbes tombantes*) which formed part of the costumes of those who presented themselves before the great of the earth during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The men with their wigs or elaborately powdered heads, gold-mounted swords,[2] brocade and velvet coats covered in gold embroidery, with lace ruffles, were on the whole better off; but they were almost as dependent, in their splendid silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, on finding their sedan-chairs — which invariably went astray — as the ladies themselves. No carriages were allowed in the Royal Court, except those of certain privileged possessors of the *entrée du Louvre*, whose special sedan-chairs, covered with crimson velvet and followed by three footmen, awaited their owners' arrival and conveyed them inside the buildings.

In English society a certain amount of interest was taken in the marriage of the Dauphin with the daughter of our old ally, and Mr. Walpole's faithful correspondent, Madame du Deffand, kept the owner of Strawberry Hill well posted in the events—social and otherwise—of the French capital. On May 19 she writes:

> You have guessed rightly, there are worries without number. The minuet that Mademoiselle de Lorraine is to dance to-day occupies a number of people ("a troublé bien des têtes"). The peers, joined to the nobility, have presented a memorial to the King against the pretensions of the Lorraine princes; the King answered yesterday—

[1] "Ground floor" in English; but rooms so designated were considerably raised above the level of the ground, and reached by various flights of broad shallow steps. On the garden side the windows of the apartments of the *rez-de-chaussée* opened on to a terrace.

[2] Mr. Morris, the American Minister, had to apply for special permission to present himself at the Tuileries without a sword, which, he said, threatened, on account of his wooden leg, to trip him up on the parquet floors which existed in all the palaces.

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here is his reply. There is a certain amount of doubt as to the request of Monsieur de Mercy, which may result in many ladies excusing themselves from going to his supper and ball.[1]

This refers to the request, often repeated and as strongly urged upon the Empress, that she would formally order her ambassador to obtain some signal mark of Royal favour on behalf of a member of one of the great families of Lorraine, at the moment of the alliance of a descendant of its Dukes with the great-great-grandson of Louis XIV., who had annexed their country. This was precisely the opportunity for which the widowed Comtesse de Brionne, an acknowledged leader of Paris society, still handsome, and gifted with talents which were only equalled by her pride, was constantly on the look-out. The memoirs of the time are filled with accounts, some of them very amusing, of her attempts to get her children, whose father was related to a junior branch of the extinct Dukes, recognised as foreign princes, and as such to occupy a position before that of the peers of France and immediately after Princes of the Blood Royal. On this ground she demanded, and on more than one occasion obtained, great matrimonial prizes for her sons and her only daughter, Mademoiselle de Lorraine, who, in defiance of all etiquette, she called Princess Charlotte of Lorraine —a title which was properly reserved for another Abbess of Remiremont, the unmarried sister of the late Emperor Francis. Born a Rohan-Rochfort, a much-admired member of that brilliant côterie of which the Duc de Richelieu's charming daughter, Comtesse d'Egmont, was a choice spirit, a constant visitor to Chanteloup and friend of the beloved and respected Duchesse de Choiseul, Madame

[1] Marquise du Deffand to the Hon. Horace Walpole: *Correspondance complète*, edited by Monsieur de Lescure (Paris, 1885).

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de Brionne's pretensions and their persistent recurrence were wholly unworthy of her name and position. She certainly sounded, with no uncertain touch, the first note—destined to swell into a loud and discordant chorus—of blame of everything that poor Marie-Antoinette eventually said or did. The King's reply, which is characteristic, evoked a kind of indignation meeting, presided over by the Bishop of Noyon in the absence of the Archbishop of Rheims, at which it was decided that none of those representatives of great families, over whom precedence had wrongfully been claimed, should dance at the Court ball. The King's curious manifesto, which may be taken as an example of his compositions, is as follows :—

The Ambassador of the Emperor and of the Empress-Queen in an audience which he had with me, asked me, on behalf of his masters (and I am obliged to give credit to all he says) to consent to show some attention to Mademoiselle de Lorraine, on the present occasion of the marriage of my grandson with the Archduchess Antoinette. Dances at the ball are of no consequence, because the choice of dancers of both sexes depends only on my will, without distinction of place, rank, or dignity, except the princes and princesses allied to me by ties of blood, who cannot be compared or put on a par with any other French individuals; and desiring on the other hand to introduce no innovations at my Court, I rely on the great and the nobles of my Kingdom in view of the fidelity, submission, attachment and even friendship which these have always shewn to me, and to my predecessors, to call forth nothing that could displease me, especially at a time when I desire to prove to the Empress my gratitude for the present she has given me, which I hope, as you do, will constitute the happiness of the remainder of my days.

[True copy.]
(Signed, etc.) SAINT-FLORENTIN.

This peculiarly-worded notice was suitably regal in feeling, but unfortunately, being what he was, Louis XV. was far more likely to derive what he would consider the happiness of the remainder of

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his days from the Pompadours and the du Barrys of his life than from any present the Empress was likely to make him.

A considerable number of reliable authorities attach importance to this incident and say that it was the beginning of Marie-Antoinette's unpopularity. Comte de Mercy, referring to the "fermentation" occasioned by the execution of his orders, suspended further action in the direction commanded by the Empress until she had received his account of what he calls "a coup-manqué" difficult to redress, owing to the King's irresolution. No further allusion suggests that he considered it important.

On Friday rumours were current to the effect that the ball would not take place. On Saturday the King intimated the contrary, coupled with the assurance that he himself would note the names of absentees. At five o'clock the cause of the commotion, a pretty and amiable girl, her cousin Mademoiselle de Rohan, and the Princesse de Bouillon arrived alone in the ball-room. Having been informed that a number of those who habitually attended Versailles balls were waiting at home apparently to see what would happen next, the King sent a peremptory message to eleven or twelve of his subjects, who duly appeared, and dancing commenced at the curious hour of seven, probably by daylight, as it was nearing the end of May. The opening dance was composed as follows: the bride and bridegroom; Princesse Clothilde and her second brother, the Comte de Provence; the Comte d'Artois with his cousin the Duchesse de Chartres—none of whose ages, excepting that of the last named, exceeded sixteen years; the Duc de Chartres and his sister the Duchesse de Bourbon; the Princesse de Lamballe with the Prince de Condé, whose eldest son, the Duc de Bourbon, was dancing

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to order with Mademoiselle de Lorraine. The crowd all stood round watching the minuet according to the custom whenever princes and princesses of the House of France took part in a dance, and the King sat in an armchair facing the room (his immense household between him and the orchestra) naming the dancers according to a list he held in his hand. Signing to the Comte d'Artois to come and speak to him, the King indicated the next dance; in which, besides the young Prince, who took his place with the Duchesse de Duras, the following joined (the list is given in detail because of the subsequent celebrity attaching to the various names):—Prince de Condé with Vicomtesse de Laval; Mademoiselle de Rohan with Prince de Lambesc (Comtesse de Brionne's eldest son); Duc de Coigny and Princesse de Bouillon; Marquis de Fitz-James and Duchesse de Mailly; Monsieur de Blagnac and Marquise de Donnissan;[1] Monsieur de Belzunce and Comtesse Jules de Polignac;[2] Monsieur de Vaudreuil and Madame Dillon;[3] Prince Starhemberg and Madame de Trans; Monsieur de Claremont-Tonnerre and Madame de Puget; after which Prince de Lambesc and the Maréchale de Duras (who had, apparently, surmounted her indignation) figured in a *mariée*, followed by an *allemande* danced to perfection by the Archduchess and the young Duc de Chartres,

[1] "Madame Donnissan" as the name is written by Madame du Deffand, and "Marquise d'Onezan" by Monsieur de Nolhac, was Marie-Françoise de Durfort-Civrac, daughter of the Marquis de Durfort, French Ambassador to Vienna. Her only child, born two years later, became the well-known Marquise de la Rochejaquelein, of La Vendée fame.

[2] This was the first appearance at Court of Marie-Antoinette's future friend, the lovely Gabrielle Yolande-Martine, daughter of a Comte de Polastron.

[3] "Comtesse" Dillon was a Mademoiselle de Rothe, married to her cousin, Arthur Dillon, a younger son of Lord Dillon. Madame de Rothe was of English extraction, had married a General de Rothe, and was generally regarded as inclining to intrigues of a political character.

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neither of whom, it appears—unlike the Dauphin, who seemed more shy and *gauche* than ever—were intimidated by the crowds, or even by those spectators who were mounted on the benches in order to see more clearly.

After the "collation," country dances succeeded till 10 o'clock, when the King and Marie-Antoinette betook themselves to a balcony of the window of the *Galerie des Glaces* to watch the whole of the Court and Parisian society, joined to about 200,000 spectators who nearly filled the park and gardens, gazing at the fireworks and illuminations. This, the last and most gorgeous of the open-air fêtes in which Louis XV. took so much pleasure, has been commemorated by Moreau "le Jeune," whose beautiful drawing can be seen in the Louvre. The Grand Canal was also lighted up, and covered with boats, from a miniature man-of-war (constructed at the State dockyard) to a Venetian gondola, the boatmen in gay, many-coloured costumes. Below on the terrace promenaded the Royal Family, Princesse de Lamballe with the Duc de Penthièvre, and the young Duchesse de Chartres with the Prince de Conti. Not far from these was Madame de Boufflers, the "Idole" of the society of the Temple, painted by Olivier, in whose "Thé à l'Anglaise" all the figures are portraits. The Duc de Choiseul walked about with his sister, the Duchesse de Gramont, the latter looking disapprovingly at the magnificently-arrayed figure of Madame du Barry, to whom the Duc d'Aiguillon, keenly conscious of the approving glances of the King at his window above, was giving his arm and as usual his moral support. "The fireworks were less beautiful than had been hoped," wrote Madame du Deffand to Mr. Walpole, "because the smoke obscured the general effect: but the illuminations, as well as the

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spectacle of the ball, were of the greatest and most superb magnificence."

The blame for the unpleasantness caused by the pretensions of the Comtesse de Brionne and the construction of the State minuet was generally cast on the First Minister and the Imperial ambassador—the first as a Lorrainer by descent, and the second, having large landed interest in the Duchy, being equally credited with sympathies which he was far from possessing. Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, engaged in conveying the Envoy-Extraordinary between Paris, Compiègne and Versailles, had his hands full with the arrangements for his official fêtes, which lasted a whole fortnight, and proved so expensive that he was forced to apply to his own Government for an extra grant of 5000 florins. He had besides to deal with the crowds of troublesome foreigners who solicited interviews with the Royal bride and demanded places from which to witness the various pageants. Nor was his opinion asked by the Empress, who, goaded by continual solicitations to give her orders through the official channel, proved by her consent how imperfectly she had gauged the disposition and temper of the French nobility. It would have been well, indeed, had Maria Theresa taken the warning to heart, for it was a significant sign of the times and an indication of one of the greatest perils which her child was destined to encounter in her splendid lonely existence—at an age when other girls are beginning to take an interest in their lessons and have no graver matters to engage their attention than the illness of a pet dog or the death of a favourite canary.

But the ruffled susceptibilities of a Duchesse de Noailles, or the untimely pretensions of a Comtesse de Brionne, gave momentary place to matters of greater import. The illuminations of the City of

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Paris, mismanaged by Monsieur Bignon in the absence of Monsieur de Sartines, Chief of the Police, who apparently were not present in sufficient numbers, or were without adequate instructions for the direction of the crowds which filled the narrow streets, resulted in a panic and a dreadful disaster, in which many lives—including those of a number of children—were lost. The best account of this horrible calamity, which comprised many dramatic incidents, one of which has been cleverly reproduced in a modern novel, is by Prince de Montbarrey,[1] who fell with the Maréchal Duc de Biron into a deep ditch from which only the personal strength of the Prince served to extricate both. The Dauphine, who arrived in company with her aunts in order to witness the pageant from the Place Louis le Grand, returned to Versailles bathed in tears, and neither she nor the Dauphin lost a moment in sending all their available money to Monsieur de Sartines for distribution among the families of the victims, whose coffins, followed by large crowds, were interred in the cemetery attached to the Madeleine. Who could then have believed that those of the hero and heroine of the day were destined, in the dim and dreadful future, to find a resting-place in that same Cimetière de la Madeleine?[2]

[1] *Mémoires du Prince de Montbarrey*, vol. ii., p. 6.

[2] *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, by Maxime de la Rocheterie, vol. i., p. 45 (Paris, 1889).

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CHAPTER II

THE BRIDEGROOM'S FAMILY

WHEN the eighteenth century was still young, a foreign lady living in Paris wrote as follows to a relative in Germany:—

> All that we read in Holy Writ of the excesses that were punished by the deluge, and of the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, does not even approach the life that is led in Paris. . . . Nothing is more rare than religious belief: no one is ashamed of vice . . . and if the King were asked to punish all those who deserve it, he would have neither princes, nobles or servants left . . . no house in France would be out of mourning. . . ."

The writer of this letter was admirably qualified to pronounce an opinion on the state of society. A German princess, and cousin of George I., King of England, she had spent her whole life from a very early age in France, and was the mother of an only son, who perhaps more than any one man of his day—or any other day—was responsible for the total subversion of public morals: none other than Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, otherwise "The Regent."

The reign of Louis XV., which had already extended to over half a century, was ill-calculated to repair the evils which had signalised his minority. Memoirs and letters of the time afford abundant proof of the shocking ignorance of the upper classes even as to the bare existence of obligations on their

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part in regard to the masses of the unfortunate people. It may be urged that the unit of a population surrounding and depending on a Court affords no certain indication of the needs of a country or the trend of the majority. We are, however, now restricted to the consideration of that same fraction, and are concerned, not with the cause or the nature or number of the causes that produced certain effects, but with the bearing of these on a small section of society.

Women were accustomed to enunciate opinions with perfect freedom and force on any and every conceivable subject, supported by the pleasing certainty of attracting as much notice as they could desire—a form of attention from the other sex which Necker's astonishing daughter sought for later on in England in vain.[1] Talleyrand's saying that those who knew French society only *after* the Revolution had never known what the pleasures of life could be, applied chiefly to women, some of the most fascinating of whom seem to have been hard and narrow-minded enough. Madame de Sévigné, worthy to be addressed by the friend of her youth after forty years of intimacy without the shadow of a break: "Believe me, you are the human being in the world whom I have most truly loved," went happily to her grave, undisturbed by the faintest misgivings on the score of the maladministration of her children's native Brittany. Long afterwards the humane and charitable Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, writing almost on her death-bed to her favourite brother, had no word of pity to expend on a tragedy the details of which it is impossible to read now without vivid sensations of horror. "You will have

[1] "If you had been twenty months in France, you would think these female politicians are not immaterial," wrote William Eden, first Lord Auckland, to Mr. Pitt from Paris in 1787.

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heard, no doubt, of the execution of Monsieur de Lally"—the unfortunate Lally had accompanied the Duc de Richelieu in youthful days of Court favour on a mission to Dresden in connection with the Dauphine's own marriage—"it was a very necessary example to give." And if this was the spirit in which the people were governed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it can be no great matter for wonder that when waves of revolution, evoked by the march of progress from prehistoric times, swept over Europe, large numbers of innocent victims fell before the storm.

The object and dimensions of this work admit of no detailed considerations of the abuses that prevailed in, and marked, the long reign of Louis the Fifteenth of the name. That the King's example of folly and worse had permeated the upper classes of his subjects, that the Government was rotten to the core, that the disordered condition of the national finances constituted in itself an increasing evil of the most fatal description, are incontrovertible facts which must always be taken into consideration. The actual expenses of the Court—enormous as these were—can only be regarded as a comparative drop in the ocean of wholesale abuses. Nor was the King in a condition of comfortable illusion on the score of the magnitude of the task that must confront his young and inexperienced heir at no distant date, for five years before he had written to Choiseul as follows, in those curious disjointed sentences which are so unmanageable in translation:—

I approve what you told me yesterday at the committee. Monsieur de St. Florentin will be here to-morrow: I shall impress on him that he should ask Monsieur d'Aguesseau from me for an account of his work on the Parliaments in general, and in particular on that of Rouen; but, thinking over what you told me the day before yesterday of the

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necessity of having a Chancellor—Monsieur de Lamoignon is past eighty-two, and you know better than any one what he is worth. If he fails, or dies, whom are we to take in his place? Monsieur de Praslin[1] wishes to leave after this journey, every one is talking about it, and he has sent for his furniture from Compiègne: is this the moment? Moreover, he told me he had proposed to you to take back the Foreign Affairs, and that you told him you could not do so, as you would soon be following him. You know perfectly well that this is not my view, and that I deferred to it on your account. The moment is so critical, I cannot believe that either you or he are thinking of this. . . . A last reflection that pierces my heart, and that I have confided to no one: the state of my son. It is true that at this moment he seems better, but if he fails me (I know all there is to say on that point) but (*sic*) a child during many years, even when I am well in health is a slight support. At least in the case of my son, I can count on a successor who is fixed and firm, and this is all with which to face (*vis-à-vis*) the republican multitude. . . .[2]

AT FONTAINEBLEAU, *October* 25, 1765.

That remarkable document, the King's last will and testament, dated two years later, is perhaps better known. It begins: "I have governed and administered ill, due to the mediocrity of my own talents, and to my having been badly seconded"—but the accusation as regarded Choiseul at least was not altogether just.

The Choiseuls were an old and noble family of Champagne, a branch migrating to Lorraine, where François Joseph took the name of Stainville on espousing an heiress who was so dull that Madame de Graffigny vowed by all her gods each time she visited the Château — nick-

[1] Cæsar Gabriel, Comte de Choiseul-Chevigny, later Duc de Praslin. Replaced his cousin the Duc de Choiseul in the Embassy at Vienna, 1758; Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1760; Minister of Marine, with a seat on the Finance Council, 1766.

[2] This now famous letter was communicated to the *Revue de Paris* in 1829 by the Duke's heir, Gabriel de Choiseul. It has been frequently reprinted of late years, and in the original is illiterate and involved beyond description.

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named "de l'Ennui"—that she would never return. Monsieur de Stainville, Tuscan Minister at the Court of France, was not particularly intelligent either, and was chiefly known by his fondness for good food. This tiresome couple's celebrated son owed little of his brilliancy and talents to his parents. He was the eldest of five children: his next brother, known as Comte de Stainville, was in the service of the Emperor; and the third, a priest, was Bishop, and later Archbishop, of Cambrai. One sister was Abbess of the Order of St. Peter, at Metz; and Beatrix de Choiseul-Stainville's ill-assorted marriage (August, 1759), with a widower, the Duc de Gramont, who preferred the society of the members of the *corps de ballet*, ended in about three months in a complete separation, when the lady returned to the shelter of her brother's roof. Etienne François de Choiseul-Stainville, born near Lunéville in 1719, following the profession of diplomacy under the Most Christian King, was recalled from Vienna to Paris to replace the disgraced favourite of Madame de Pompadour—Cardinal de Bernis. One of the most salient causes of the new Minister's triumphal progress in the direction of the highest posts open to a subject was undoubtedly due to his remarkable success with the fair sex—a success in no way due to his personal appearance. A short figure, red hair of the wrong tint of that often beautiful colour—fortunately disguised by powder—a wide mouth, and a large flat nose, do not sound attractive nor accountable for the number of their possessor's female adorers.

Among the endless women for whom (in rapid succession) Choiseul professed unalterable devotion, he owed most to his own wife, one of the most interesting figures of her brilliant time. Louise Honorine du Châtel, descended not at all remotely

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from a *bourgeois* family of Toulouse called Crozat, brought to her fortunate husband not only a substantial share of this world's goods, but also those qualities of heart and mind sufficient in themselves to ensure the respect and regard of all who knew her, including two such dissimilar characters as Louis XV. and Mr. Walpole. "She is gentle, pretty, and very agreeable," wrote the latter; and it did not take this excellent judge of character long to discover that this was but faint praise to bestow on this object of just encomiums. She was not, strictly speaking, beautiful — she was on too small a scale to be anything but what has been denominated a "pocket Venus"—but she was perfectly proportioned, exceedingly pretty in a delicate style, strongly recalling a highly-finished figure in Dresden china. She is thus described in her husband's fragmentary memoirs:—

> This marriage was on my part, as on that of Madame du Châtel (the recently widowed mother of the young bride, whose own opinion was apparently not asked) rather one of sentiment than of interest. Mademoiselle du Châtel was then engaged in a lawsuit on the result of which depended a large part of her fortune. She won the suit after my marriage: she received from her family large sums, of which she permitted me to dissipate the greater part: but her virtues, her charms, her feelings for me and mine for her, gave to our union a character very superior to the advantages of fortune.

Was the writer wilfully deceiving himself and others, or was the romance inseparable from a nature like his accountable for these highly-coloured statements? The fact was that Madame de Choiseul not only set a much-needed example to all the other great ladies of her day and won universal respect, but condoned conduct in her husband that would have exhausted the patience of any ordinary wife fifty times over. Her forbearance was further

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tried by her sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Gramont, who made her home at Chanteloup and the Hôtel de Choiseul, and who, strong-willed and imperious, exercised boundless influence over her brother. The latter continues: "In concert with the Duc de Gontaut"—father of the Duc de Lauzun, then five years old—"I brought great application and regularity to bear upon this affair of the lawsuit."

Co-heiress with the Duchesse de Choiseul to what in those days was considered a very large fortune was her only sister, Antoinette Eustacie, Duchesse de Gontaut, who, deeply in love with the Comte de Stainville, as he was then, urged with her last breath his subsequent marriage with her young sister, and died at nineteen, three days after the birth of a child who lived to grow into the too celebrated Lauzun. It speaks volumes for the morals of the time that the parentage of Eustacie de Gontaut's child was openly attributed to Choiseul, a presumption of which no one talked more openly than the Duc de Gontaut himself.

Choiseul was bold to audacity, extravagant to folly and consumed with pride, but, unlike his master, he knew how to repay those who served him and his interests. One who knew him well wrote of him:—

> Never existed a Minister so indiscreet in his observations as Monsieur de Choiseul: it was his principal defect. His levity, his taste for joking, his light-heartedness, his wit, his impetuosity and not infrequently the outbursts of his temper were the natural result of his character. . . Never have I known a man who was able to diffuse around him such pleasure and contentment. When he entered a room he hunted in his pockets as though to draw upon an inexhaustible fund of gaiety and laughter.[1]

An Englishman attached to the Duke of Bedford's mission, in 1762, records his impressions of the powerful Minister:—

[1] *Souvenirs du Baron de Gleichen*, Teschner, 1868.

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Although he was emerging from his study I saw none of that absent expression and affectation of preoccupation by which Ministers of State like to be distinguished. They say he works with great facility, that he seizes the point of a question with extraordinary perception. . . The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has changed since Monsieur de Choiseul assumed control.

As an official he suited a master who hated trouble of any sort or kind. Choiseul "worked little and did much." Standing beside the King's arm-chair before the great table with its green velvet gold-fringed cover, the Duke was wont to produce, in rapid succession, a variety of prepared and annotated documents and State papers for the superficial perusal and the ill-considered signature of the Sovereign. Louis XV., bored and absent-minded, drummed on the table with his fingers, or glanced yawning towards the clock on the splendid red marble mantelpiece decorated with wreaths and hanging garlands of flowers in water-gilt metal. This was at Versailles, where, as in nearly all the palaces, the King's cabinet was next to his bed-chamber; and it was in the former room that Choiseul enjoyed the coveted honour, as in the last years of the expiring monarchy it was pre-eminently considered, of a *travail à deux* with the ruler of a vast kingdom. In order to ascertain the Duke's real opinions we should consult, not those official letters and memoranda which, according to custom, abound in expressions of devoted admiration, but the private and fragmentary memoirs[1] intended

[1] The authenticity of many so-called memoirs by the Duc de Choiseul have been repeatedly, even fiercely, contested. In 1790 a former secretary, Soulavie, issued (according to the advertisement) an edition "written by the Duke and printed under his own eyes at Chanteloup" in 1778. This was published by Buisson, living at the Hôtel de Coetloquet, Rue Hautefeuille. This publication was subsequently disavowed by the Duchess and her nephew on account of some indiscreet revelations concerning people then living.

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—as they actually were — to be published after the demise of both master and servant.

If the following was not the Duke's composition it is so like his real opinion of the King as to be worth quoting :—

He has inconceivable vanity — the vanity of valets carried to any extent: he has not the strength of mind to reap any advantages, for he has the virtue of realising that he is capable of nothing, and is inwardly aware that his unfortunate character is beneath all other works of nature; I have heard him remark that he is inconsequence personified, and that he should not be surprised if he were mad. . . . His vanity leads him to believe that, in order to preserve his authority, it is sufficient for him to dismiss from time to time those Ministers in whom he has shewn confidence. . . .

Then in another place the Duke wrote, in the utmost disgust at his own disgrace :—

The King's character resembled soft wax, on which the most dissimilar objects can be temporally traced: he had an excellent memory and forgot none of the facts which illustrated his own consequence. . . . He was born on the throne; he had been at five years of age the object of the nation's affection and good-will: the apparent delicacy of his health, the preservation of his life—so valuable with regard to the position of France in Europe—the flattery and the care of those who brought him up had, I believe, the effect of producing the weakness of his body and mind—added to the vanity which caused him to suppose himself altogether different to ordinary men. He did not always hide this pleasing opinion. One day, after speaking to me of our pleasures and of the sins against religion which those same pleasures led us to commit, he told me that I should undoubtedly be damned. I protested against this over-severe judgment, representing to him that while in no way admitting this danger for myself, it made me tremble on his account, as his own confessions made it clear to me that his sins against Divine laws were similar to mine, over and above the added dangers of the public scandals to which these gave rise. He replied that our positions were very different, and gave me to understand that he was himself a chosen

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vessel, and that the Almighty would never permit *him* to be damned, while he, the King, fulfilled his mission of protecting the Catholic Religion in his kingdom. In consequence of his opinion that he was a direct emanation from Providence for the support of religion . . . he was convinced that he was at liberty to give himself up to all his weaknesses without remorse or the feeling of committing a crime. . . .

Choiseul was distinctly in the fashion in being anti-British. For many years, as Ambassador and as Envoy-Extraordinary and latterly as Minister for Foreign Affairs, the ostensible enemy against which his policy was mainly directed was Prussia; but there is no doubt that the Franco-Austrian alliance in part, and the celebrated "Pacte de Famille" *in toto*, were conceived with the object of checkmating a little country of whose constitution and laws the Duke's writings prove him to have been a sincere, even ardent admirer. He detested Lord Chatham even more than he did Madame du Barry—said one who knew both—which meant bestowing on the Great Commoner an amount of dislike of which one would hardly suppose anybody so gay and frivolous to be capable. He had, as we shall see, waged ceaseless war against the unseemly elevation of the *ci-devant* Mademoiselle Bécu, holding her up to such pitiless ridicule as only a past-master in the art of raillery could achieve. Choiseul once visited London, when the vagaries of the climate of that smoky city had the happy result of evoking a characteristic repartee. During a fog of particular density and duration, some one inquired why cannons were being fired off. "Apparently some one has perceived the sun," replied the Duke with great promptitude.

On a visit to Paris in the autumn of the year 1765, Mr. Walpole, who, as the son of a former Prime Minister of England, was supposed to be in his element in political circles, was invited by the

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Duc de Praslin to a large party to meet "twenty-four ambassadors and envoys." The Hôtel de Praslin (in the Faubourg St. Germain) was described by another Englishman, who visited it over half a century later, "as a large Hôtel—some of the rooms, and one in particular, are magnificently fitted up and furnished. The floors are most elegantly and expensively inlaid . . . but what chiefly deserves attention is a very valuable collection of pictures, chiefly Flemish. . . ."[1] In addition to other merits the Stainville family loved art, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs also filled his new mansion in the Rue de Richelieu with the fine pictures which were sold, with most of his possessions, after several years of open house, when the *élite* of a splendid company congregated under the hospitable roof of Chanteloup to pay their rather expensive respects to the fallen Minister. The same odd mixture of splendour and squalor that struck the casual visitor to Versailles, was noticeable in the Hôtel de Praslin, where the footmen, powdered since break of day, spoilt the effect of their gorgeous liveries by tying scarlet pocket-handkerchiefs round their necks. The Duchesse, "jolly, red-faced, rather vulgar in appearance," proved "very attentive and civil" to a stranger and a foreigner. This was his first meeting with the Duchesse de Choiseul—pretty, with fine eyes and admirable manners—"cheerful, modest, full of attentions, with the happiest propriety of expression . . . full of reason and judgment." All this was more evident as time went on, and she and the Englishman became great allies until they fell out many years later over Madame du Deffand's letters, when it must be confessed that the owner of Strawberry Hill had considerable reason for thinking himself ill-used.

[1] *Diary of Viscount Palmerston in France*, July-August, 1791; edited by Oscar Browning (Cambridge, 1885).

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Among the four-and-twenty ambassadors was the Marquis de Guerchy, whose last diplomatic post had been at the Court of St. James', and who presented Mr. Walpole after dinner to a "little volatile being . . . I saw him but for three seconds, which is as much as he allows to anybody or anything." Long afterwards Mr. Walpole, discussing his friends in Paris, recalled that "the Duc de Choiseul had more vivacity than any hundred Frenchmen" he "could select." He was always in a state of what he would himself probably have described as *sur-excitation*—full of fuss and animation, and this, joined to his great abilities and the tremendous amount of business he managed to get through—he was credited with a spy of his own in every Embassy in Europe—gained him the nickname of "le cocher de l'Europe" from the Empress Catherine.[1] On that evening of the first dinner-party at which Mr. Walpole met the Stainvilles, the Duc de Praslin impressed him less favourably than the cousin had done. "His wisdom is of the grave kind . . . he does the honours sadly, and I believe nothing else well, looking important and empty." The guest concluded by rather ungratefully giving it as his opinion that his host was "a very silly fellow." In spite of this unpromising beginning they all became great friends, chiefly, probably, owing to Horace Walpole's intimacy with Madame du Deffand, who spent her life in a little set of which the Choiseuls and she herself were the moving spirits.

Had the Dauphin[2] survived instead of predeceasing his unworthy parent, it is probable that Choiseul's connection with affairs of State would have come to a conclusion a great deal earlier than

[1] *Gustave III. et la Cour de France*, by A. Geffroy, p. 48 (2 vols., Didier, Paris).

[2] Louis, only surviving son of Louis XV. and Marie Leszczynska, born at Versailles, Sept. 4, 1729, died at Fontainebleau, Dec. 20, 1765.

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it actually did. There was no love lost between the heir to the Crown and the Minister; as usual the Court and Government were divided into factions, and one of the bitterest enemies of the Choiseul party was the Duc de la Vauguyon, a narrow-minded opponent of reform of any description, who supplemented his own slender talents by persistent opposition, and by the advantages accruing from his position as governor to successive Dauphins. Not very long before his death the only son of Louis XV. had a violent altercation with Choiseul: during the heat of the discussion the Dauphin requested the Duke not to talk so loud. "Sir, it is always permitted to those who tell the truth to speak loud." The Dauphin turned his back, while the Duke, determined to have the last word, added: "Sir, you leave me; I must, however, inform you that, though I may have the misfortune some day to be your subject, I shall never be your servant"; at which the Dauphin left the room, spoiling the dignity of his exit by banging the door. The Prince subsequently complained to his father of the manner in which he had been treated, which elicited one of Louis XV.'s rare sensible speeches: "My son, you have so deeply wounded Monsieur de Choiseul that you must not be surprised at anything."

Whatever his enemies might say of the Dauphin, he was religious, conscientious, upright and determined to neglect no part of his duty as he conceived it. He returned the deep affection of his proud, reserved second wife, Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, "Pépa" as the Royal Family called her: together they took the keenest interest in the education of their five surviving children, and grieved together over the death of their promising eldest boy, the Duc de Bourgogne, whom his mother, unconsciously forestalling the future wife of her third son, Louis-

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Auguste, used to call her "chou d'amour." The Musée du Louvre possesses a fine portrait by La Tour of Marie-Josèphe. All the painter's art cannot make her pretty—the Princess considered herself uncommonly plain—but it is a good face, and the thick features wear an intelligent expression. Her hair is dragged back off her forehead and adorned with tight little bunches of flowers: a string of huge pearls (probably Anne of Austria's famous legacy) encircles the Dauphine's throat, and her dress, square-cut, is composed of the innumerable rows of satin and lace ruchings with which the early pictures of Madame de Pompadour have made us familiar. Marie-Josèphe was not any more popular than many other foreign princesses have been in France: it is doubtful whether any woman obtained—still more doubtful if she preserved—any real hold on the affections of a susceptible and an eminently fickle people. By the public she was considered cold, haughty and despotic, whereas she was in reality very shy. She was fairly tall, and possessed great dignity and a good figure without much grace. She and his sisters, especially Madame Adelaide, adored the Dauphin, a proof that he also was unjustly credited by the people with many imaginary bad qualities.

The most harmonious relations prevailed in the private lives of the Royal Family; the good old Queen, Marie Leszczynska, was truly attached to her daughter-in-law, who was herself on terms of intimacy and affection with the unmarried princesses, who had the advantage of being near her own age. Her mother, Electress of Saxony (Queen of Poland) might have disputed with our own Queen Charlotte the palm of plainness. Coincidences multiply in these histories. The first Marie-Josèphe was an Austrian Archduchess—elder of the two daughters of the Emperor Joseph the First. This cousin of

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Maria Theresa had, besides the Dauphine, another daughter, who was Queen of Naples, and the garrulous Marquis d'Argenson unconsciously struck one of the most discordant notes of the coming Revolution when he wrote:—

> Certain persons belonging to the inner circles of the Court have confided to me that the Dauphine is proud, and has a temper: that she much resembles her sister, the Queen of Naples, who is not a good example where the well-being of a kingdom is concerned: that like her mother she is haughty—a true "Autrichienne."

These were probably calumnies, denied *in toto* by some, and considerably modified by others, such as the good Duc de Luynes, who says that it would be difficult to rival the goodness of the Queen, but that the Dauphine's humours were of short duration, and she was ordinarily very gracious. She seems to have been unfortunate in her household: among the four ladies who alone, according to Madame du Deffand, regretted her death, was a certain Duchesse de Caumont, *née* Noailles, who was selected years later to go and meet the young Italian bride of the Comte de Provence, and who, as Marie-Antoinette wrote to the Empress, was credited with an infinite capacity for involving the "late Dauphine in squabbles."

Marie-Josèphe had no liking for foreigners, and it is improbable that she took any part in the gracious reception accorded to David Hume when that somewhat overpowering future recruit to Lord Hertford's Embassy was received in lengthy audience by the Dauphin, one of whose pleasures consisted in long philosophical discussions, and one of whose favourite authors was Locke. After this Mr. Hume went on to "pay his respects to three future Kings of France, one of whom only had arrived at the dignity of a jacket and frills. The Duc de Berri, aged nine, gravely proclaimed

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himself an admirer of Hume, and begged to be enrolled among the number of his friends: the Comte de Provence assured him that his arrival had long been impatiently expected by Frenchmen—even by those for whom, like himself, the perusal of his fine history was still a pleasure to come: and the Comte d'Artois, who was six years old, and looked four, mumbled some fragments of a panegyric which he had half forgotten on the way from the nursery."[1] But the favours accorded to David Hume were regarded with no approving eye by Mr. Walpole, who, arriving two years later on a visit to his cousins in the British Embassy, was filled with displeasure at the aspect of the historian established as a social success, "gratefully admiring the tone of Paris—never having known any other." The tone of Paris was, however, a great improvement on that of London, as far as concerned intellectual conversations and the recognition of men of letters who, in their own capital, would be barely tolerated in the inner circles of a certain exclusive society, which rated a man's birth and family connections above the best powers of the mind, and all the pre-eminence to which conspicuous and highly-cultivated talents can attain. The Duke of Richmond had already adopted the same line as Horace Walpole, by asking Lord Hertford—who considered it "a most improper question"—"whether Mr. Hume was my friend, or my secretary. But Lady Hertford knew how to answer, by painting the friend in strong colours." It was not often that literary lights found themselves in such kind hands as these. And yet the spoilt child and mordant mouthpiece of London society has for ever disproved one at least of Lord Macaulay's allegations, by the consistent kindness

[1] *The Early History of Charles James Fox*, by Sir George Trevelyan, p. 297 (Longmans).

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shown by the brilliant Horace during long years of steady friendship to the little, plain, middle-class spinster who, by her own talents and merits alone, has immortalised the name of Hannah More.

Mr. Walpole also went to Versailles, over which now hung the shadow of death. The Dauphin, "a ghost, poor creature," was almost *in extremis*; the Dauphine "in her bed-chamber, dressed and standing, looks cross and is not civil" —she was naturally very unhappy. The good old Queen (who survived her son about two years), "in an immense cap, at her dressing-table," showed a desire to hear the latest gossip from London, which Mr. Walpole, in a very uncourtier-like spirit, frustrated by running away to "see the Dauphin's three boys, who only bow and stare: the Duc de Berri, weak and weak-eyed; the Comte de Provence, a fine boy; and the Comte d'Artois well enough." The whole concludes with "seeing the Dauphin's little girl dine, who is as round and fat as a pudding." This is a glimpse of the future Queen of Sardinia, over whose excessive *embonpoint* the light-hearted Parisians waxed very facetious when Marie-Clothilde departed to begin her married life at Turin, pronouncing her to be an adequate exchange, owing to her size, for the *two* Italian sisters married to the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois.

However unprepossessing their mother might be in manner, she was a wise, as well as a thoroughly good woman. Marie-Josèphe realised her own position, and appreciated at its true value her influence with the King, in spite of the attentions which, to give him his due, he never failed to pay to the widow of his only son. Addressing her principal correspondent, Xavier de Saxe, "Although I am conscious of my want of capacity," wrote the Dauphine, who was destined before long to

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follow her husband to the grave, "as nothing is left to me in this world but my children. . . . I neglect no endeavours to merit the King's confidence, the surest way to lose which would be to show any desire to possess it. That is why I have always passed over this subject in my letters: but I cannot give any greater proof of it than my occupation of my apartment where I frequently receive visits which, on the one hand, give me pleasure, and on the other cause me a constant heartache, because they recall him who came and went perpetually: besides which, it is very inconvenient, as I can never be sure of a moment. But, as I now no longer live except for the sake of my poor children, and I regard this world merely as the road to another, I submit to all contradictions, seeing in my life while it lasts, one perpetual sacrifice to the Will of God."[1]

The chief topic in the Prince's letter, to which this admirable reply was sent, was the wish common to the brother and sister, who apparently had no modern prejudices against the marriages of first cousins, that the Duc de Berri should be affianced to their own niece, Amélie de Saxe—a plan which, as we know, was ultimately frustrated on purely State grounds by the detested Choiseul. Thus, as has been truly said, might Marie-Antoinette have escaped her destiny.

Even the Dauphin Louis' poor, broken-hearted widow was not free from the machinations of intriguers, who feared her undoubted influence with the King. She detested her husband's favourite Compiègne "with its melancholy garden, which bores me to death (*m'ennuye à crever*)."[2] The allusion in her letter to her brother to

[1] *La Mère des trois derniers Bourbons*, by Monsieur Casimir Stryienski (Plon-Nourrit).
[2] *Ibid.*

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her apartments refers to the constant changes in her "lodgings" in the gigantic Palace of Versailles, where ceaseless endeavours were made to separate her from the King. Marie-Josèphe had been fond of Fontainebleau :—

> I like this wild spot: they tell me I have bad taste—which is very probable. . . . I prefer this forest and rocks and untrimmed trees to those at Compiègne, which resembles a park more than a forest. The château here is bad, it is true; but I like antiques ("antiquailles"), I feel that St. Louis, François Premier, and my dear Henri Quatre lived here, and I am happy in my small *entresol*. I am in a little palace—alone in the midst of every one—and I find it charming. I feel well here, and at Compiègne as though I were dying.

When the Dauphin actually died at Fontainebleau, his family could not face their next autumnal residence within its ancient walls. For once, as regarded Versailles at any rate, the King was firm. He declared his dear "Pépa" should be exposed to no more sorrows, and when the Court architect-in-chief, Gabriel, lending himself to a palace plot, pronounced the great beams of the ceilings at Versailles in urgent need of expensive repair to render them safe, the King gave prompt counter orders without reference to anybody. This, Marie-Josèphe's third and last move, had the effect of making her more accessible to the King than when she had occupied the large *appartement* of the late-lamented Madame de Pompadour. The Princess moved into a set of little rooms (described in detail later on) situated over those of the King, and probably less stuffy—though some of the windows looked on to a court—than those she had vacated, a detail which, even in the case of a person dying of consumption, seemed to occur to no one. We must except the celebrated Genevese doctor, Tronchin, who attended her latterly, called in when it was too late to do anything but ameliorate

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sufferings increased if not caused by profound ignorance of the nature of her illness, and whose energetic advocacy of unlimited fresh air, plain wholesome food, and the plentiful use of cold water, aroused active antagonism, or at best a kind of half-irritated derision. Theodore Tronchin was a friend of Voltaire and a great character, and was fortunately not easily affected by adverse criticism, of which he experienced enough and to spare in France. He had studied in England under George II.'s doctor, Sir Richard Mead, was an intimate friend of Professor Van Swieten, physician-in-ordinary to the Empress of Germany, and had patients, correspondents and warm admirers all over Europe. The descendant of a Provençal family, who had embraced the reformed faith and migrated to Geneva, he had married a Dutch lady and practised for twenty-five years in Holland. He first visited Paris in 1756, responding to an urgent summons of the Duc d'Orléans, who, according to Grimm, was inspired by Sénac, Louis XV.'s doctor, bitterly opposed to the Faculty of Paris, to send for the Genevese practitioner whose success in the newly-discovered art of inoculation was a matter of general and fierce discussion. "What do you think of the departure of the great doctor?" wrote Voltaire to his banker. "He did not tell me where he is going, but I have guessed it." "He went to bed," adds Madame Denis, the philosopher's niece, "persuaded that we imagine he is going to Prussia."

On arrival in Paris (March, 1756) his compatriot Necker, destined to arouse in France an antagonism as fierce and of a more extended character, wrote that he had supped with the doctor, that he was well and prodigiously busy and on the high road to fortune. His fortune was at that particular moment to be arrived at by means of the inocula-

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tion of the Duc de Chartres and his sister, who, subsequently married to her cousin the Duc de Bourbon (heir of the last Prince de Condé), became mother of the unfortunate Duc d'Enghien. Such a departure on the part of the first Prince of the Blood stirred Paris to its depths. The Palais-Royal was besieged by crowds of eager disputants; while the Duchesse wept so bitterly that her husband offered to postpone the operation *sine die*: "They are your children as well as mine."

"Have them inoculated, sir," she replied; "but leave me to weep."

The poor Duc d'Orléans, who was very good-natured, and, like a great many extremely stout people not specially strong-minded, set off for Versailles, in an agony of indecision. But Louis XV. was not likely to be of much use to his cousin in such a matter.

"Vous êtes le maître de vos enfants," he answered curtly, meaning no doubt: "You are at liberty to do as you like with your own children, so long as you don't bore me."

It speaks well for the Duke that, destined to the misfortune of having an "Egalité" for his only son, he was beloved and respected by such a man as Theodore Tronchin.

Tronchin was assisted by two surgeons—Hosti, who had studied in England, and an Englishman, "Kerpatri" (? Kirkpatrick). After three weeks' suspense success was assured; Tronchin, his patients and their parents were overwhelmed with congratulations, the Duchesse received an ovation at the Opera and the physician was commanded to Versailles:—

> The famous Monsieur Tronchin . . . saw the King in the gallery, and afterwards in private; M. the Dauphin and Madame the Dauphine interviewed him for an hour and a half. The Dauphine told my son there is no question

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of inoculation. Monsieur Tronchin saw the Children of France: it seems there is reason for anxiety about the health of M. the Duc de Berri. . . .[1]

At this period of his existence that most unfortunate of kings was a large, flabby, unhealthy baby of eighteen months, cutting four double teeth with pain and difficulty under unfavourable conditions, and it was not altogether surprising that he was attacked by convulsions. It apparently never occurred to any one that sea air might be good for these poor children after the stuffy, vitiated atmosphere of Versailles, but the energetic Tronchin wisely relegated them to Meudon, no doubt profiting by the occasion to deliver himself of some of his favourite homilies. He was especially great on the subject of the neglected science of hygiene; he had all the windows of the palace at Versailles thrown open, and called the attention of the King to the dangers of the stagnant waters of the Grand Canal. He constantly deplored the fatal activity of his medical colleagues—"the peaceful course of nature is worth more than a course of doctors: it is often the height of wisdom to do nothing." He might have added that it is a proof of genius to know when to do nothing. He waged war against the amazing remedy, *par excellence*, for every ill, so dear to the heart of the eighteenth-century practitioner, namely bleeding. He thought most people over-ate themselves, frequently remarking that "the days of gluttons are numbered." He advocated cold water to be taken after and not during meals, and waged war against all hot drinks, especially tea and coffee. The old and middle-aged were urged to take exercise, and the benefits of daily gymnastics were impressed on the rising generation.

[1] The majority of these particulars and many others are taken from a delightful book, *Un Médecin du XVIIIe Siècle* (Theodore Tronchin), by Henry Tronchin (Plon-Nourrit, Paris, 1906).

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Tronchin became more the fashion than the celebrated modiste Madame Duchapt; large numbers awaited inoculation, while the children of the Ducs de la Rochefoucauld and de Belle Isle fought over their respective precedence. Loaded by the grateful Duc d'Orléans with money, presents, and assurances of esteem, Tronchin left Paris for Lunéville, where the Queen's father, Stanislas, the dethroned King of Poland, eagerly awaited him. Early in the year 1766 Tronchin returned to Paris as physician-in-ordinary to the Duc d'Orléans; warmly welcomed by that stout and amiable prince, he found himself comfortably installed at the Palais-Royal in apartments consisting of five large rooms adjoining those reserved for Madame and Mademoiselle Tronchin. He was permitted to receive any number of private patients, and was provided with a carriage and two pairs of black horses, besides a man cook and three lackeys, *i.e.* footmen. He reprobated the custom of stooping over a writing-table, and invented a special desk, a piece of furniture which the writer of his life tells us was to be found in offices in Paris so late as 1840. In order not to offend the susceptibilities of the French doctors Tronchin also smothered his head in one of the enormous wigs, to the use of which he attributed the prevalence of paralysis and apoplexy. Comte de Cheverny has recorded with much amusement how his friend disposed of the offending article of dress. "As we are alone for some time," said the doctor, "you shall see what I do with it." So saying he snatched off his wig and hung it on a nail which he had evidently knocked for the purpose into the magnificently carved and painted panels of his consulting-room.[1]

It was in the autumn of that same year that

[1] *Mémoires du Comte de Cheverny* (Plon-Nourrit, Paris, 1884).

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Tronchin was called in to see the dying Dauphine. She had moved the previous September into her new rooms above those of the King. They were particularly accessible. One staircase started in the balcony of the Court of Stags, and another from the King's library above the grand cabinet, both terminating in two little boudoirs placed on either side of Marie-Josèphe's bed-chamber. Hence we may infer that the privacy which she naturally longed for and failed to obtain in the *appartement* of Madame de Pompadour, was no less denied to her at the last. The *désœuvré* old King seems to have been perpetually fidgeting up and down some one's concealed staircases, and appearing unexpectedly through their secret doors in his dressing-gown, on the pretext of making coffee, an art in which he imagined he excelled. His poor daughter-in-law, who had probably fallen into a doze after a restless night, must have often wished he would keep away, or at least show her less untimely attentions. Her life had been very dull since the Dauphin's death. Had she survived him for a longer period, her eldest son would have started life better equipped for the ordeals through which he was destined to pass. She herself taught her sons Latin, history sacred and profane, and the multifarious duties enjoined by obligations to Heaven and to man upon those on whom the government of a great kingdom must eventually devolve. Her chief occupation and her only pleasure consisted in making laborious transcripts of her husband's writings, and in carrying on his system of education for her children. She was probably a good judge of character. In her counsels specially written for the Duc de Berri, she quotes some phrases borrowed from the memoirs of Louis XIV.: "As soon as one has fixed one's mind on any one point and perceives

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the better part, this should be taken . . . nothing is so dangerous as weakness." Then the Dauphine drew up a table of her son's ancestors, reminding him that he "is descended from the most noble, the most illustrious family in the universe—beginning with Hughes Capet"—a name destined in the undreamed-of future to ring with a horrible and momentous import in the ears of the boy for whom she was writing. It will be curious and instructive to notice later on the wide divergence between the tone of these instructions and those composed years later by another half-Austrian princess for the instruction of another poor little Dauphin, destined to be a King only in name.

Marie-Josèphe, as has been observed, had no taste for foreigners. She was uncompromising in her likes and dislikes, of which latter she bestowed a large share (greatly on religious grounds) on the English. The fact was, also, that Dresden and Hanover were sufficiently in touch for a Saxon princess, whose own parents were setting an example of conjugal relations to every crowned head in Europe, to form no very high opinion of the manners and morals of George II. and his myrmidons. Writing to the Abbé Soldini she said, "It will never be by my advice that my children learn a language I hate . . . the people to whom their education is entrusted taught them some words a year ago, and the Comte de Provence showed so much taste for it that I forbade it altogether," so the future Louis XVIII. was taught Italian instead, which was perhaps fortunate, as he was married *nolens volens* to a Sardinian princess at an age at which an Eton boy's thoughts are concentrated on the glories of Fifth Form, or the fit of his first tail-coat. The education of these children should have been by all rights of a

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singularly perfect description; they were given so short a time in which to carry on any essential studies. In the matter of English, however, both the Dauphin and the Comte de Provence ignored their mother's wishes after her death, both princes attaining considerable proficiency in the detested language; they spoke and wrote well, and translated several historical works into French. Long after the younger became King of France, copies of *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa Harlowe* were seen on his table.

But all this was many years after Marie-Josèphe had faded gently out of an existence which at the best had been a sad and difficult experience. In addition to her own troubles she had taken the vicissitudes of her family, and the cruel treatment various members of it experienced from the King of Prussia, greatly to heart. The Dauphine herself was one of a family of eleven, some of whom were but ill provided with this world's goods. The Queen of Spain, the Electress of Bavaria, the heir to the Electorate of Saxony, and last but not least Marie-Josèphe herself, were more fortunate from a worldly point of view than, for example, the amiable and sensible Princess Christine, who had migrated to France. This poor lady, although installed through the good offices of her sister as an Abbess of Remiremont, fell upon evil times, and was rescued from a "hôtel garni" in Paris years later by Marie-Antoinette, who very properly objected to the King's aunt being allowed to remain in furnished lodgings.

Marie-Josèphe's other brothers and sisters added to her anxieties by frustrating her benevolent schemes for their benefit, and her strenuous efforts to discover suitable *partis*. Princess Cunégonde's undisguised intention of allying herself with her cousin, Joseph, King of the Romans, and her

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hurried journey to Bohemia, accompanied by her brother, in furtherance of this matrimonial project (apparently not shared in by the future Emperor) horrified her sister in France. Marie-Josèphe wrote, with as much good sense as dignity: "I should never have had as much courage as Cunégonde, and nothing would have made me capable of exposing myself to such an affront. I should have begged the King of the Romans to give himself the trouble of coming to Dresden—a journey which is of no consequence for a man, but of very much in the case of a woman, the shame of a refusal reacting on her entire family." Poor Princess Cunégonde's personal attractions would have been unlikely to gain for her an Imperial crown, if Comte Valentin Esterhazy is a reliable authority, for twenty years later he was immensely struck by the frightfulness of her lady-in-waiting—"only second to that of Her Royal Highness, to equal whom would have been impossible."

Marie-Josèphe was a great stickler for etiquette. When, after an engagement of four years, Prince Albert was permitted to marry the elder sister of Marie-Antoinette, the device on the seal of the Archduchess Marie-Christine (Duchesse of Saxe-Teschen), aroused the indignation of the Dauphine, ill as the latter then was. As usual, Prince Xavier was the depository of his sister's confidence. "One thing surprised me very much," she wrote on April 30, 1766, "which was to see that our new sister-in-law had the arms of Austria on the right, and those of Saxony and Poland on the left. I cannot believe you consented to this arrangement, which strikes me as humiliating for our House, never having seen a woman place her husband's below her own, even when the former are inferior. And I fancy that a Prince of Saxony

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is on a par with an Archduchess"—a proposition to which it is unlikely that any member of the Imperial family would have assented. Family feeling, however, probably had a good deal to do with the opinion, the Queen of Poland, to whom her daughter was fondly attached, being, as the elder of the two daughters of the Emperor Joseph I., the principal sufferer by the long series of state intrigues and wars, which had all contributed to ensure to Maria Theresa, her husband, and her children, the thrones of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia.

The brother to whom Marie-Josèphe's best affections were given remained "Jean sans terre," as she called him — John Lackland — to the end: it was perhaps fortunate for her peace of mind that his sister never knew of his eventual marriage to a Mademoiselle de Spinucci, a maid-of-honour.

Meanwhile the old Queen Marie Leszczynska had also fallen into bad health. "All this makes one tremble for the future," wrote the Dauphine, "for she takes no kind of precautions about what she eats; not that she takes drugs, but that she eats too much, and then she becomes very devout and fasts, all of which is misplaced, she not being in a state for it." It seems to have been a kind of race between them, won only too easily by the younger. About two months before the Dauphine succumbed to her fatal disease the Genevese doctor evidently suspected its contagious nature: he reversed all the previous treatment and his one cry was "fresh air." He was horror-struck on entering her rooms, exclaiming—injudiciously as the sequel proved—"The Princess is poisoned!" When it is observed that it was the immemorial custom at Versailles to close and seal hermetically the windows from All Saints' Day to Easter, the

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state of the atmosphere may be better imagined than described.

Tronchin was too much in earnest about his profession to bethink him of courtier-like caution, and his rather rash speech was quite sufficient to awake a thousand rumours dormant since the respective deaths of the Dauphin and Madame de Pompadour. The great family of Rohan, unfairly quoting what Tronchin had never said, circulated a story on the doctor's authority that all three deaths were due directly or indirectly to the Duc de Choiseul, who, promptly informed of these pleasing reports, vowed vengeance on the honest doctor. The medical confraternity congregated at Versailles could not agree, and the controversy waxed loud and long to the verge of indecency. Tronchin wrote urgently to the King, absent at Choisy in more than questionable company, that certain of his patient's symptoms were not of a nature to be committed to paper. On the face of this it might be supposed that this was a gentle means of conveying that the gravity of the case demanded the King's presence—to absolve a new doctor from the immense responsibility of reporting by letter on a hopeless case to one who had absented himself entirely for his own convenience. The King, unwilling to be convinced, handed the letter to Choiseul who flew back to Paris in one of his ill-timed ebullitions of temper exclaiming: "What is this rogue of a charlatan driving at? Does he mean to insinuate that I have poisoned the Dauphine? But for my respect for the Duc d'Orléans I would break his head with my stick." Tronchin meant nothing of the kind. He was far too simple and straightforward for any such wicked insinuation. None of the discarded doctors would help him, and while watching his methods they spread spiteful tales of his inepti-

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tude. The Princess declared herself much better and followed her new adviser's orders with faithful care. That worthy man set to work with his customary energy to save his patient, ordering "meat cooked in wine, cold fricassees, grilled pigeons, rabbits au gratin, asparagus, oysters and fish." She was told to drink chocolate, orangeade, Burgundy and Imperial Tokay. The apparent result of all this was that she slept well without drugs, her temperature went down, and she drove and walked with assistance. But she had been taken in hand far too late; her bones seemed to be coming through her skin, and her large eyes shone with an unnatural lustre.

Tronchin was in despair: he was not long in realising that all his care and skill would avail nothing, and towards eight o'clock on a Friday night in March 1767, Marie-Josèphe breathed her last. That she died of consumption is proved by the report of the post-mortem signed by all the Court physicians and surgeons. The Genevese doctor was immediately assailed by a fresh storm of abuse, led by the celebrated Professor Antoine Petit, who, joining forces with the King's doctor, Sénac, now become Tronchin's enemy, not only listened to the stories of poison but declared that Tronchin had diagnosed the Dauphine's case all wrong. He was, however, strongly supported by the King and Madame Adelaide; the latter dictated a letter to her lady-in-waiting, the Comtesse de Narbonne, bidding Tronchin present himself on any day he conveniently could, adding a scolding to one who had allowed himself to be affected by evil speaking. Sénac on his side, having remarked before the King that Tronchin was entirely wrong, was promptly informed that he had not long been under a misapprehension, seeing that six weeks before the catastrophe Tronchin had

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foretold the contents of the *procès verbal*. The mere fact that such horrible tales were circulated and credited shows the condition of the Court and capital, and the lengths to which spite and credulity could go; but the calumnies were eventually discredited by most right-minded people. Seven years later, in Vienna, Louis de Rohan actually revived the old scandal in order to harm Choiseul, giving as his authority his aunt, the Comtesse de Marsan. When these rumours reached the ears of Maria Theresa she wrote at once to her ambassador in Paris for the rights of the story, and Comte de Mercy-Argenteau replied:—

All the world here knows, that in concert with the late Duc de la Vauguyon the Comtesse de Marsan, to gratify an implacable hatred, put about the rumour that the Duc de Choiseul poisoned the late Dauphin. The public in general was indignant at so atrocious a libel: knowing moreover that the Dauphin never enjoyed a moment's health after the smallpox, which attacked his chest and undermined his constitution. The Dauphine contracted the same illness, of which she died. Never has such an opinion as that given out by the Coadjutor been attributed to Tronchin. What is deplorable is that the thirst for vengeance of the Comtesse de Marsan and the Prince de Rohan against the Duc de Choiseul derives its source from motives that cannot be exposed to Your Majesty, and is due to questions of gallantry.[1]

And the lady filled the highly coveted and responsible post of "Governess to the Children of France"! She was nice-looking, clever and agreeable, with a soft voice and admirable manners, besides being unusually well-informed; but with it all, she was false and incredibly bitter, not to say violent, where her prejudices were concerned. If she was a good friend, which is rather doubtful, she was an unscrupulous and relentless foe. Every

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Empress Maria Theresa, June 7, 1774.

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book and letter published during the last fifty years tends to prove what an immense amount of harm she did to poor little Marie-Antoinette from the very beginning of her married life; until five years later when, on the departure of Princess Clothilde for Turin, Madame de Marsan resigned the active portion of her charge at Court, and a young Queen wrote gaily to Vienna: "We are very nearly quit of this famous governess: I say 'nearly' because she retains her lodgings, although she has resigned her functions."

For many years she made a regular appearance at Versailles on the occasion of the memorial service for the late Dauphin and Marie-Josèphe. Arrayed in deep mourning and assuming an expression to match, she thus addressed her former pupil, advancing to greet, rather coldly it must be confessed, his once "chère maman": "I am here to attend the service in memory of Your Majesty's august parents—poisoned by order of Monsieur de Choiseul."

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CHAPTER III

THE BRIDE'S FAMILY

They tell me never was there so amiable a character as that young princess, and that if she is not spoiled at the Court of France, she will one day be a blessing to that country.—Lady Mary Coke to Lady Strafford, from Vienna, 1770.

In France itself, little information on the subject of the future Queen had filtered through private channels, and the official particulars were meagre enough. The comparatively few loyal adherents and genuine well-wishers of the reigning Bourbons attributed the greatest importance to her mental attainments and her moral qualities, as also to the influence she might be expected to exercise in a family in which good influences were conspicuous by their absence. On the other hand, the numbers whose interests and pleasures depended largely on those general disorders—the result of years of mismanagement and the total absence of tone or moral standards in the Court and capital—regarded with equal dislike and suspicion the advent of a new and possibly (from their point of view) disturbing element. And the Franco-Austrian Alliance was as yet of too recent a date to secure to a Hapsburg any foregone claim to popularity. General respect was accorded to the Empress, even by those who possessed little of that sentiment to bestow upon anybody: but the sinister shadow of "the Regent" had fallen heavily in years gone by

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on the reputation of the children of a sister, whose unexpected merits met with little recognition in her own country compared with Lorraine itself.

The part Elisabeth-Charlotte played in life—and especially in that strange *ménage à trois* in which Horace Walpole took so keen an interest—lead us to infer that she was the one and only estimable member of a family whose public lives were one prolonged scandal, and whose domestic arrangements were conducted on a singularly irresponsible basis. She transmitted certain of her good qualities to her children, some of whom did not survive childhood or early middle life. Prince Charles of Lorraine was married to Maria Theresa's younger sister, who died after a few months of union; he was as excellent a man as he was a bad and unlucky general, and won golden opinions as Governor of the Austrian Netherlands. Anne-Charlotte, Abbess of the noble order of Remiremont (the revenues of which provided incomes for unmarried princesses), spent a rather colourless existence without discredit to herself or her family. Others, if they attained no special distinction, gained no unenviable notoriety.[1] Francis-Stephen was generally considered to have entered the world with a golden spoon in his mouth, loaded as he was with the honours and riches that Maria Theresa's devoted affection assured to the husband of her choice.

Whatever may have been wanting in the public knowledge of the character, appearance and tastes of the young girl who became famous from the day she made the first marriage in Europe, was compensated later by the incredible number of stories that were published about her childhood

[1] The eldest daughter, Elisabeth, married Charles Emmanuel III., King of Sardinia, as his third wife. She died in 1741, leaving one son, the Duc de Chablais.

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during her lifetime, and formed the theme of innumerable books after her death. Among these tales existing on a slender foundation, one in particular may be referred to. It has been repeated again and again in French books, and copied with curious persistency in English. The apocryphal anecdote in question originated with two prolific authors to whom every student of these histories is deeply indebted.[1] While on her way to Warsaw on a visit to Stanislas Poniatowski, King of Poland, the celebrated Madame Geoffrin wrote as follows, to a friend in the Rue de Richelieu at Paris—Monsieur Boutin, Receiver-General of Finances and owner of Tivoli :—

VIENNA: *this 12th June*, 1766.—Yesterday I saw the Empress . . . the reigning one, and all the Royal family at Schönbrunn: the Empress talked to me with inexpressible goodness and charm: she told me the names of all the Archduchesses, one after another: then the young Archdukes: this family is really the finest that it is possible to imagine. There is the daughter of the Emperor, great-grand-daughter of the King of France: she is two years old. The Empress impressed on me that I should write to France that I have seen this child and think her pretty.

In a footnote the authors add :—

This child, beautiful as an angel, was Marie-Antoinette de France.[2] Madame Geoffrin, foreseeing what hymeneal projects might one day be realized, remarked quite low, but loud enough to be overheard: "There is a charming little Archduchess. I should like to carry her off." "Take her, take her," cried the Empress gaily, as she passed.

Now the authors' inference is purely imaginary. Even concluding, as one or two English writers

[1] *Portraits intimes du dixhuitième Siècle*, by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, p. 143 (Paris, 1855).

[2] This mistake has no historical significance. It was perpetuated also by so undoubted an authority on all matters pertaining to French history as the late Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild.—*Personal Characteristics*, p. 97 (Macmillan, London, 1896).

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have ingeniously done, that *deux* was a misprint for *dix* or *douze*, nothing could have made Marie-Antoinette, at that time ten years old, any blood relation to Louis XV. The description tallies exactly, however, with a certain tiny Thérèse, only surviving child of the Emperor Joseph and his beloved first wife, whose mother had been the King's eldest daughter, the "Madame Infante" of so many memoirs. Two years later, when the child was only four, Prince Kaunitz announced the impending receipt by the Ambassador in Paris of her portrait—"the head as perfectly resembling as the body is little so: this, as you will see is that of a young lady of ten. . . . The Empress's love for her grand-daughter is beyond description; she imagines the King must care for her equally"—he was probably bored to death with all children. Directions follow for the delivery of the picture, together with an autograph communication from the Emperor, "who wishes to profit by this occasion to write a friendly letter to the King, his grandfather. I have no doubt all this will be received by the King with the respectable sensibility which I know in him," etc., etc. He concludes: "But nevertheless I pray you not to fail to detail to me down to the smallest anecdotes relating to this, in order that I may render an account to the Emperor and Empress who, on their side, are very sensitive on the score of personal friendship."

At the end of the Emperor's letter are five lines in a large round hand: "Knowing that you love me, dear grand-papa, I assure you that I am wonderfully well, and that I had only fifty marks" (the little writer had been inoculated for small-pox, the fatal disease that cost her mother's life) "which gives me great pleasure. Why cannot I shew these to you and embrace you, loving you so much?"[1]

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, p. 261.

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This charming little Thérèse died before her eighth birthday,[1] to the grief not only of her adoring grandmother but of the Archduchess Marie-Christine, her mother's great friend, who had taken the little girl under her special care. The Emperor Joseph never ceased to mourn the loss of the child he had called his second self, and who in her turn was so devoted to him that when she was dying she would take her food and medicines from no hand but his. The Empress's household told an English visitor that this child "was beautiful, and the care the Emperor took of her education was amazing."

As incorrect as the interpretation put upon the letter of Madame Geoffrin, is the statement so often found in English books that Cardinal de Rohan was sent to Vienna in the singularly unclerical capacity of an acknowledged authority on the female sex, to report on the appearance of the future Queen. It is certain that nothing would have induced Maria Theresa to receive a priest with so bad a reputation as his on any such strange pretext or mission: added to which, as a matter of fact, Louis de Rohan never set foot in Austria until 1772, when he was despatched as ambassador to Vienna, to the natural surprise and displeasure of the Empress. Evidently the Royal family were somehow or other made aware of these inventions, apparently of somewhat ancient date. The absurdity of the story was strongly commented on and its inaccuracy proved by the Comte de Provence himself in 1798. It probably came to their knowledge after the fatal episode of "the Queen's necklace," when all France coupled Marie-Antoinette's name with his in a horrible and most unjust conjunction.

[1] The Archduchess Thérèse was born March 20, 1762, and died in January, 1770.

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No sinister premonitions of misfortune are discernible in what is probably the oldest portrait extant in France of the last Queen of the old *régime*. This is, or was, at Versailles, and shows Marie-Antoinette as a baby of about two, seated solemnly on a sofa between her parents, round whom are grouped the remainder of their children. She figures also in one of the two pictures now at Trianon. The first shows four of Maria Theresa's daughters singing the *Parnasso Confuso* —the words of Metastasio set to Glück's music. The second represents Marie-Antoinette, rather stiff in her court dress with paniers and narrow pointed bodice, dancing *vis-à-vis* to her brother Ferdinand, while Maximilian as the God of Love pirouettes in the background, watched by a *corps de ballet* consisting of four sets of children of both sexes, members of the great families of Auersperg, Fürstenberg and Clary. The occasion was the second marriage of the King of the Romans with Marie-Josèphe, daughter of the titular Emperor, Charles VII., and sister of Maximilian, Elector of Bavaria—a union intended to heal many public feuds and productive of much private pain to the couple intimately concerned. Twelve years after their ill-omened wedding-day, the prettiest Queen in Europe desired to hang a copy of this picture in her newly-acquired Trianon.[1] The little trans-

[1] Certain modern writers convey the impression that these pictures never left Trianon. As a matter of fact they were removed in the general spoliation of Royal Palaces in 1791-92: they were found in a second-floor gallery at Versailles, and figure in Louis-Philippe's catalogue, dated 1837. Monsieur Geffroy, the erudite *collaborateur* of Alfred, Ritter von Arneth, says that until the appearance of the latter's edition (1866) of Marie-Antoinette's letters to her mother, the original *emplacement* of these pictures was unknown, and that they were replaced according to the indications thus obtained. In the current Part I. of *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette*, by MM. A. Vuaflart and H. Bourin, the editors state that Monsieur Eudore Soulie, the then Curator, gave these indications when the Empress Eugénie inaugurated an Exhibition at Trianon in 1867. Be this as it may, the pictures were

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action evoked one of the Empress' most charming letters :—

Mercy has sent me the measures of a picture that you desire to have at Trianon: it is the Opera played at the Emperor's wedding. I have the greatest pleasure in life to serve you—but I require an explanation. There are two one the Opera, the other the ballet in which was the little Queen with her two brothers. I fancy you wish for the last? or possibly both? You shall be obeyed: but in that case I must have another measure for the second picture, and know from which side the light falls, (and) if it will be framed or attached to the wall as tapestry is. I will endeavour that you shall be obliged before (the elapse of) the eight years that I myself have awaited your portrait with so much *empressement*; but I shall not let them go before receiving that dear and much longed-for picture. This is vindictive: but peace will be easily made when I see your features. . . .[1]

Those same features began early to be the despair of every painter who attempted to transfer them to canvas.

Early in 1768, attacked more severely than usual by his customary *ennui* and depression, the King, who had never evinced any justifiable anxiety as to the Duc de la Vauguyon's wretched system of education, began to show tardy pre-occupation about the future of his grandchildren, informing the Duc de Choiseul, who repeated it to the Spanish Ambassador, that "if anything happened to him (the King), his two youngest grandsons would not have enough bread to eat." It was probably about this time that the First Minister had a bet with a colleague that Louis XV. was the most foolish person in France. Shortly after the latter made "an inconceivable speech" at a Council meeting, upon which Choiseul

replaced after an absence of over eighty years in the place for which their dead and gone owner had destined them. The originals are at the Hofburg in Vienna, and like the copies are unsigned.

[1] Maria Theresa to Marie-Antoinette, January 5, 1778.

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triumphantly proclaimed himself the winner of the wager, while its unconscious object indited a letter to his dear cousin the King of Spain, asking his advice with regard to a suitable marriage for Louis-Auguste, mentioning the probable bride. Charles III. replied cordially approving the project—"whether politically for the consolidation of the alliance with the Court of Vienna, whether for the happiness of the Dauphin, seeing that this young princess is said to be very pretty, and to have had a perfect education." There was more truth in the former than in the latter surmise, as we shall see.

In his *audience de congé* Prince Starhemberg had been asked in 1766 by the French monarch to request the Empress to reserve the hand of the youngest archduchess (then ten) for the Dauphin.[1] "Monsieur le Dauphin will have a charming wife," remarked the Prince subsequently to the French Ambassador at Vienna, to which Monsieur de Durfort, relapsing from his usual primness, responded in a manner that merits the historian's comment of "des propos légers": "The morsel is succulent, and will be in good hands if this is so."[2] Perhaps Monsieur de Durfort was endeavouring to live up to his temporary condition of a gay bachelor at the French Embassy, where, in the absence of the ambassadress, the household had got thoroughly out of hand, and continual brawls with the servants of Prince Kaunitz and others resulted. The Chancellor wrote to his pupil in Paris:—

I subjoin a miserable detail ("une misère"), only in order that you should know of it, in case, which I think unlikely, he should feel it advisable to write of it to his Court. I cannot

[1] *Vide* Monsieur Jules Flammermont, who, contrary to his usual custom, does not cite the source.

[2] "Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette," Jules Flammermont, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*.

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recollect whether I told you about a year ago of what passed of the same kind, between this good man's footmen, mine, and several others; but I think it only right to tell you that the worst possible tone reigns in his house and among his domestics: their insolence, either because he does not know, or does not wish to reprimand them, has produced scenes and constant complaints. Do not, however, mention this unless the Duc de Choiseul speaks first of it.

Madame de Durfort was at Versailles, in attendance on a princess—Madame Victoire—and does not appear to have troubled herself to write more often to her husband than his official superiors had done for some time past.[1] The fact was that he missed the very capable wife he had married, in more important directions than those pertaining to domestic arrangements even in such an establishment as that of the vast Palais Lichtenstein, hired by the French Government in anticipation of the festivities for the marriage of the Dauphin. Anne Marie de la Faurie had been practically "the making" of Améric Joseph de Durfort, whom she had married in 1744, a distant relation of the noble family of that name, endowed with few brains or qualifications for the posts he owed to far different causes. He was originally a Colonel commanding a crack cavalry regiment, whence Madame de Durfort had propelled him into diplomacy, got him nominated Minister to Venice, and maintained him with so much credit at the Legation at Naples that he was appointed in 1767 to succeed the Comte (afterwards Duc) du Châtelet in the coveted appointment of the Embassy at Vienna. The frequency with which the statement is emphasised that he was assigned no active rôle in the negotiations for the Bourbon-Hapsburg marriages, and the tone of the orders he received in connection with the wedding festivities, and his relations with

[1] Monsieur Jules Flammermont.

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his future Queen, suggest a certain amount of disparagement of his mental calibre.

Madame de Durfort foresaw and forestalled his impending retirement, and on his return to his own country took effective steps to prevent the rapid descent from brilliancy to obscurity to which diplomats and administrators who remain away too long are liable. She returned home, and installed herself where she had every facility for urging in the highest quarters those uncertain claims to preferment which were eventually showered on the fortunate individual, who, as the Empress pointed out again and again, would be connected in history with her daughter's marriage.[1] Madame de Durfort, besides being unusually discreet, was Austrian in her sympathies, and lost no opportunities of showing her friendly feelings to Comte de Mercy, who found the lady very useful indeed. She probably owed some of her ultimate success to his strong support.

If it must be confessed that Monsieur de Durfort's compositions are very inferior in style and manner to those of his colleagues, his letters are less dry and constrained than those of an English Ambassador at a critical period of French history.[2] One of his first letters to Choiseul is to the following effect, the Empress being referred to as "this Princess":—

This Princess said to me the other day in a tone of satisfaction: "I have got the portraits of the Royal Family—my late daughter-in-law gave them to me." Occupied in convincing

[1] The ways of Louis XV. differed widely from those of his ally, whose constantly recurring requests for "some favour for Durfort" remained without response until the accession of Louis XVI. "I am now expecting some favour for Durfort," wrote the Empress to Marie-Antoinette, July 1, 1774, "although I agree with those who assert that he only had the ceremonial; but this requires some acknowledgment." In another place the Empress expressed her relief that she saw no examples of such "manigances" at *her* Court as were involved by the delay.

[2] 1789-90.

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this Princess of the pleasure I experienced in hearing her friendly expressions, I thought to do right in informing her that I had orders to obtain the portraits of her august family. The joy she experienced was diffused over her fine countenance, and she replied briskly: "My family is not small—there is moreover a part at Schönbrunn." It came to me through more than one source that she spoke of this, and the Court painter called on me under the pretext of paying his respects. After having discoursed with him on his art, he told me that he knew I desired to have the portraits of the Imperial family, and offered his services. I gave him the commission. . . . I await, Sir, your opinion on this subject and trust it will be favourable to myself: at the most I said I had the order but did not mention from whom. . . .

This officiousness was not well received, and Choiseul wrote:—

The King did not approve, Sir, that you asked *by order* for the portraits of the Imperial family: although you did not say by what order, it is certain that you could only have had this from His Majesty. . . . I must now ask you, Monsieur, not to be surprised into saying anything that may refer to a marriage, unless you receive any commands from His Majesty. However, although we already possess portraits . . . you will have the goodness to send me those you are having painted. . . .

The reply was characteristic:—

It must be, Sir, that the ciphering was badly done here or that they deciphered incorrectly in your offices. . . . I did not *ask* for the portraits, I only said I had orders to *seek* for them. The proof is to be found in the answer I received: "You will not be able to find them." I fancied at that moment I saw a chance of carrying out the instructions I have had to seize on every occasion of pleasing by suggesting that, etc., etc. I did not think it was possible to interpret otherwise what I said: I am in despair at my mistake, and I supplicate you, Monsieur, to place my intentions and regrets at His Majesty's feet. . . .

French historians expatiate on the eagerness of the Empress to secure the hand of the Dauphin for her daughter, while Austrian writers enlarge on the theme of the value to the House of Bourbon

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of an alliance uniting political considerations of the last importance to beauty, youth, and the highest rank. There is a good deal to be said for both points of view. But neither, apparently, wished to be the first to take a decided line in public, and the Empress replied to what transpired at a private interview between her representative at Paris and the Duc de Choiseul, in March, 1768, by the offer of her youngest daughter's miniature—"she would prefer them life-size, but there is no one here capable of undertaking the work"—together with that of her eldest sister, Marie-Amélie, on the eve of marriage with the old King's grandson, the Infant Don Philippe, Duke of Parma. Then Monsieur de Durfort, unmindful of a previous rebuff, took advantage of the Empress's New Year's Day reception to propose sending for a painter from Paris, to which Her Majesty replied that she would be very glad.[1] She would have been less so had she known of all the plots that were hatching in Paris. In another place we shall see in what circumstances Ducreux was substituted for Drouais and despatched to Vienna. The former was accompanied on his journey by another functionary, who figures in all the letters, diplomatic and private. On the 9th October, 1768, Prince Starhemberg begged Comte de Mercy to send what they called a "friseur" capable of showing off the abundant fair locks of Marie-Antoinette who, he added,

> has a rather high forehead with the hair growing badly. . . . Her Majesty flatters herself that a man who is perfect at his trade will succeed in correcting, or at least in concealing this small defect either by cutting the hair, or by the employment of some innocent remedy calculated to increase the growth of the hair of which the forehead is denuded, or, in

[1] "Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette," J. Flammermont, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*.

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short, by the pains he will take to arrange the whole as it is to suit the face in order that the forehead should appear covered. . . . This trifling imperfection might appear considerable at a time when high foreheads are no longer in fashion.

Very shortly after this, Prince Kaunitz's letter to Comte de Mercy contained an autograph note from the Empress to the Chancellor:—

Here are my commissions for Paris. . . . I fix for the trousseau of the Dauphine four hundred thousand *livres* which you will have paid through la Nettine[1] according to Mercy's recommendations. I will arrange with you for the repayment of this sum here: you will give me ideas on this: Mercy must not exceed it or interfere in this matter otherwise than to pay the money to Choiseul—and to send me the patterns of the *lingerie*. I am also impatient to know where the confessor of my daughter is to be found and who will be chosen: I wish also to have a *friseur*, if one can be found—but all of Choiseul's choice.[2]

Thus adjured, Comte de Mercy unearthed a *coiffeur* who had manipulated the head of Princess Starhemberg when that lady resided at the Austrian Embassy at Paris, and, further fortified by the approval of the Duchesse de Gramont, despatched the "Sieur" Larsenneur, who, judging by the Dauphine's portraits, pulled and tugged at the little princess' hair until the front view suggests the aid of a vice. "The *friseur* and the painter arrived on the 15th," writes excellent Baron Neny, making a subtle distinction between the useful and the purely ornamental; and he goes on:—

[1] Madame de Nettine, who presided over the leading Banking House in Brussels, where she was ultimately succeeded by her son-in-law, Monsieur de Walkiers. Her three remaining daughters were married in France—all in *la haute finance*—one to Joseph de la Borde, the Court Banker (with whom Marie-Antoinette's private fortune was afterwards lodged), and another daughter, married after the death of her first husband, to the celebrated minister, Calonne, in 1788. Both lived in England before and after their marriage.

[2] Empress Maria Theresa to Prince Kaunitz, November 11, 1768.

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The first has already twice dressed the hair of Madame the Archduchess, and acquitted himself to the perfect satisfaction of Her Majesty the Empress-Queen. In effect, his style is simple and decent—but at the same time very advantageous to the countenance. I am persuaded beforehand that our young ladies, who for some time past have worn mountains of curls on the tops of their heads, will leave these immediately and *coiffer* themselves *à la dauphine*.

Prince Starhemberg, well pleased on his side, proposed to get the hairdresser allotted a salary of 2000 florins, coupled with the less easily obtained permission to exercise his trade among the smart ladies of Vienna. But the verdict of posterity endorses the admirable taste developed by Marie-Antoinette as she grew older, when she finally pensioned off Larsenneur and engaged Leonard to build those towering erections that Madame Le Brun has immortalised. Larsenneur remained coiffeur-in-chief for some years: he belongs to the days when Marie-Antoinette concerned herself too little about her personal appearance. A *grand seigneur*, a leader of fashion of European reputation, has commented severely on his deficiencies:—

She (the Queen) was so little occupied with her *toilette* that she allowed one Larseneur (*sic*), who had joined her at Vienna, to *coiffer* her for some years quite inconceivably badly, (and kept him on) in order not to pain him. She used, however, directly his back was turned, to loosen her hair in front with her own fingers.[1]

Ducreux[2] was the first of many painters who discovered to their cost how difficult a subject Marie-Antoinette was. Prince Starhemberg refused to look at the picture until five lengthy

[1] *Mémoires du Prince de Ligne.*

[2] Ducreux was one of La Tour's best pupils: for the result of his work the reader must refer to the current publication *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette*, by MM. Vuaflart and Bourin (Paris, 1909), of which, however, only two parts have been issued. The editors conclude that no picture of Marie-Antoinette by Ducreux is traceable to-day.

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sittings, with three more in prospect, brought it near completion. It proved a failure and had to be done all over again: the little Archduchess "lending herself with the best grace in the world to the *ennui* of these sittings." The ambassador's son, Comte de Lorge, had been detained against his will in Vienna until the success of the portrait of the future Dauphine would justify his taking the picture to Paris, in accordance with the reiterated commands of Louis XV. It was not until May 2, 1769, that Monsieur de Lorge set out, taking Marie-Antoinette's portrait with that of her niece, the Archduchess Marie-Thérèse. Other portraits of the Imperial family by the same hand followed in detachments: the King asked the Austrian ambassador if he had seen the pictures, and on being answered in the negative, ordered the Duc de Fronsac to conduct him to his private cabinet, where only the pictures of the Archduchesses Antoinette, Christine and Elisabeth were on view. Two months later this visit was repeated in company with Comte de Paar, when they found the King himself, who addressed to them a large number of questions on the subject of the Imperial family, of every member of which he appears to have acquired a likeness, for when the painter left Vienna in November he took with him five more pictures for the King. It is instructive to perceive that two years later the unfortunate artist was begging the Duc de Fleury to recognise his claims to payment for some portraits of Princesses Adelaide and Elisabeth done long before his journey to Vienna. The Duke, replying that it had nothing to do with him, referred the petitioner to Monsieur de la Ferté, who in his memorial on the subject remarked that the painter might at least be paid the twelve *louis* he had advanced out of his own pocket for frames and mounts.

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Among the anecdotes related afterwards about Marie-Antoinette's childhood, we need not notice the one which Madame Campan says was told to her by the tutor of Prince Kaunitz's children. The story related in 1779 by Comtesse d'Ulsfeld at Vienna to Mr. Henry Swinburne, a son of Sir John Swinburne of Capheaton, is more authentic. As a child the Empress's youngest daughter was so remarkable for piety that her mother took her to a convent near Vienna in order to consult an inmate, a clairvoyant, on the danger to the devotional tendency of fourteen of the vicious atmosphere of the Court at Versailles. The nun, looking long and earnestly into the bright face, said sadly, "She will have great reverses, but will turn to religion at the last." The Empress burst into tears and seemed greatly upset. One comment on this episode is that she did not break off the marriage; but how, may we ask, could one vaguely warning voice have rendered it possible to cancel an engagement which crowned her highest hopes as sovereign and parent, to undo the diplomatic work of years, and to jeopardise the Franco-Austrian Alliance?

The Empress was credited with a tendency from which no one who knows London society intimately would entirely exonerate less highly-placed mothers—namely, a weakness for eldest sons. She certainly spared no pains to marry her daughters well; but whether she succeeded in establishing these satisfactorily in life or failed to provide them with husbands, she was apparently regarded by certain writers as responsible for every failure, whatever form these might take. After all, what was the life of a spinster who had the misfortune to be born a princess a hundred and thirty years ago? Sir Robert Keith, the chivalrous defender of the unfortunate Caroline-Matilda, Queen

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of Denmark, presented himself, when English Ambassador at Vienna, at the Hofburg on a visit of condolence to the Archduchess Elisabeth, who was recovering from the effects of an abscess in her cheek. The princess, over thirty but still beautiful, told Sir Robert how thankful she was to have been ill—any variety, she said, in the monotony of her life was a boon for which she could not be sufficiently thankful. "When we do see any visitors, my sister Marie-Anne, as the elder, monopolises the entire conversation. No one can imagine what my life is."

Neither, for that matter, was the Empress's own existence a bed of roses. Of her ten surviving children three lived and died in a state of single blessedness. No less than five, a fact seldom noticed, married Bourbons and gave a great deal of trouble. Every daughter in turn was christened Marie—but only the eldest, small, delicate and deformed, was called by her full name Marie-Anne. Mr. Swinburne says she was "pleasing, with the manners of a woman of the world." Archduchess Marie-Anne was Abbess of a convent at Prague, but spent the greater part of the year with her mother, for whom she had the utmost affection.

Next came the Emperor, whose views of statecraft, differing as they did on every essential point from her own, gave the Empress many pangs. She did full justice to his qualities of head and heart: recognised the inevitable hardness of his position, and while she gave him a free hand in the management of the army, to reforming which he devoted much zeal and ability, she nevertheless kept the reins of power chiefly in her own hands. One instance must suffice. He held strong views on the government of the Austrian Low Countries, and entertained a keen desire to make a pro-

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longed tour through the Netherlands, then under the governorship of his uncle, Prince Charles of Lorraine. The Prince was a great favourite with his sister-in-law, whose political views were his chief consideration; and she, fearing inevitable friction between him and her keen-sighted, energetic son, opposed the Emperor's project.

It is often stated that the reversal of so much of the wise policy of Maria Theresa by her successor resulted in the loss of the rich possessions of the Austrian crown. But this could only be said with any certainty provided there had been no anarchy and disruption in France to take into account. Posterity is inclined to do justice to what Sir Robert Keith called "the imperious genius of Joseph the Second." Some politicians base their calculations on immediate results—on what may be called "quick returns"—caring little or nothing for the inevitable effects of time and the march of progress. Others come eventually to be regarded as having been strikingly in advance of a day in which they were probably completely misjudged. A certain order of mind formulates schemes which necessarily only arrive at fruition half a century or more after the active brain that conceived them has mingled with the dust. Joseph the Second would now be recognised as an advanced Liberal who was profoundly mistrustful of clerical influences in political life. Now, even those who disagree with the manner if not the matter of the innovations which he endeavoured to carry with so high a hand in the brief time at his command, cannot refuse to recognise the immense scope and ability of his schemes for the aggrandisement of the Empire. His cherished dream of the acquisition of Bavaria alone proves his claims to take a foremost place among rulers. The sequel has proved that at a later subsequent date in the history of Europe his

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plans in the Low Countries might have been crowned by success. But the time had not come, and the lightning rapidity of his attempts to induce what the Empress used to call "mes sujets flamands" to accept a revised Government based on reform, first aroused the people's anger and then excited their fears. "Your country has killed me," he said wearily to Prince de Ligne, when a fatal illness, aggravated by worry, perceptibly gained ground. "Ghent, captured, has reduced me to extremity, and Brussels, abandoned, will cause my death."

No one really understood him — least of all, perhaps, the resolute, clever mother whose relations with "the most amiable and capable of sons" were so complicated and unsatisfactory, and whose love and pride and despair he remained to the end.

When very young he had been married to the charming and accomplished Isabelle of Parma,[1] a Bourbon on both sides of her family. She died after three years of intense happiness, leaving the little girl so often mistaken for Marie-Antoinette, and a gap in her husband's life which no one ever filled. Persuaded against all his wishes into a distasteful marriage with an unprepossessing Bavarian cousin, he was not long after left a widower for the second time, and remained so in spite of the diplomatic attempts which were made to unite him to one or other of Louis XVI.'s sisters.

His next sister, called Marie in her family and Christine by the rest of the world, was happily united after a very long engagement to Albert Duke of Saxe-Teschen, her cousin through his mother, and brother of the late Dauphine, Marie-

[1] The Infanta Isabelle, of whom the Empress said: "There is no moment of the day that I do not admire her." She died in November, 1763.

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Josèphe de Saxe. Inheriting some of her mother's firmness and consistency with her beauty, the Archduchess Christine achieved a conspicuous success as Governor of the Low Countries with Brussels as her headquarters—a post to which she succeeded in 1780 on the death of her uncle, Prince Charles of Lorraine, and which she and Duke Albert only quitted on the outbreak of the serious troubles above referred to.

Next in age came Marie-Elisabeth, considered by many the handsomest member of a family noted for good looks, which in her case were prematurely impaired by small-pox, that scourge of the eighteenth century. Opinions differ even among those who knew her best as to the effects of her illness on her appearance. Mr. Swinburne talks as if she had grown quite plain by the time he saw her, which, however, was not until she was forty: others who knew her as well, or better, give a different impression at a subsequent period. But for the interference of the Empress Catherine of Russia, the Archduchess might have been married to the King of Poland, and a son of the King of Sardinia was got rid of for no better reason than that all the money available at the moment had been spent upon her two sisters. Doubtfully as some of her sisters' marriages turned out, her life seems also to have been what we may call a minor tragedy. She and her eldest brother never got on well together; his favourite sisters were Josèphe, who died, and later on Marie-Antoinette. There is a reference to Archduchess Elisabeth in one of her mother's letters to another of her children: "A few minutes later she began to sob, saying that all of you were established in life, while she alone was left, and destined to remain with the Emperor, which she could never do. We had all the pains in the world to quiet her down." This

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once lovely and charming girl survived as an abbess at Innsbrück until 1808, and so far as is known ceased to be the object of any matrimonial projects after the failure of certain rather intermittent attempts to marry her off to Louis XV.

But the chief thorn in the side of the poor Empress was an erratic couple who had further complicated the relationships — Marie-Amélie, managing and eccentric, six years older than Philippe de Bourbon, Duke of Parma, who, possessed of less than average intelligence, found his principal amusements in roasting chestnuts and ringing church bells. Maria Theresa's letters to and about this particular daughter would fill several volumes, and the strenuous efforts of herself and Prince Kaunitz to regulate from Vienna the heterogeneous mass of absurdities at Parma, culminated in a rupture of long duration. When it is realised that Philippe of Parma was brother to Isabelle, Queen of the Romans, the reader will not share Marie-Antoinette's surprise that, in writing to announce the birth of his son, he forgot he was her brother-in-law, and signed himself her "affectionate cousin." It was, perhaps, about the least foolish thing he did: and after all, as the Dauphine philosophically remarked, "that is a near enough relationship considering the way he behaves."

Leopold, Grand-Duke of Tuscany until he succeeded his brother as Emperor in 1790, was son-in-law to Charles III. of Spain, whose own son, Ferdinand, adhering to the bewildering Hapsburg-Bourbon custom of a brother and sister marrying in pairs, was husband of the Empress's impulsive, warm-hearted daughter Marie-Caroline, Queen of Naples, intimately known as "Charlotte." It is a distinct relief to find that the Archduke Ferdinand married an only child, Beatrix d'Este,

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heiress of the last Duke of Modena. There was only a year between Marie-Antoinette and the last in the long list, Maximilian, eventually Prince-Elector of Cologne, who died single in 1801.

With this large family, as well as with her ambassadors in foreign countries, and her faithful servants scattered over her vast empire, Maria Theresa carried on a steady correspondence, in addition to the innumerable ceremonial communications she exchanged with members of reigning houses and their ministers. Her letters to the youngest daughter, her "charming Queen," at once the pride and the torment of her life, together with those to the ablest of her ambassadors, fill three large volumes. How—in addition to the stupendous amount of work she carried on right up to her death in 1780, the affairs of State she conducted, and the success that attended her care of her Empire—she contrived to direct the apparently trivial concerns of each daughter in turn, must remain a matter for admiring wonder.

It may be remembered that in a letter sent in original to Comte de Mercy by Prince Kaunitz, the Empress spoke of the choice of a Confessor for her daughter. The ambassador writes :—

> Her Majesty the Empress ordered me through her Cabinet to find here an ecclesiastic suited for the functions of Confessor to the Archduchess, and sufficiently versed in French literature to be useful at the same time to that young princess. Upon the advice of the Duc de Choiseul I addressed myself to the Bishop of Orléans . . . and on the opinion of that prelate I have just despatched to Vienna the Sieur Abbé de Vermond, doctor of the Sorbonne, and lately Vicar of the Archbishop of Toulouse, and Librarian of the College of the Four Nations. This Abbé seems to have all the qualities necessary for his destination—he is cultured, simple and modest, and has merited the esteem of the most respected prelates of this country.

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It is to be hoped that Comte de Mercy did not seriously include Louis de Jarente in the category of "respected prelates." The latter wrote apparently in all good faith, and the result is simply one of those exceptions which prove the useful rule of accepting no recommendation from a doubtful source:—

I venture to hope that the Empress will be satisfied: this is one of the strongest wishes I have ever felt. . . . I confidently hope that he (Vermond) will prove a success. You will be good enough to give him your orders: make all arrangements with him, and give him such letters of introduction as you may consider proper; and refer him to some one with whom he can stay on his arrival, who will assist him in obtaining lodgings, and help him by good advice to obviate the embarrassment of a very inexperienced traveller in such a large town as Vienna. . . .[1]

So the Archduchess was now provided with a tutor also, in addition to a *coiffeur*, an artist and a dancing-master.

The inability of Louis XV. to direct his children and grandchildren from a religious or educational point of view was in no sense shared by Maria Theresa and the late Emperor Francis. The latter had composed an admirable "instruction pour mes enfants," a copy of which was presented to each one of his ten children on entering life —"counsels," says Monsieur de la Rocheterie, "stamped with a lofty wisdom and a truly Christian spirit, in which he (the Emperor) speaks less as a sovereign than as a private individual,—as the head of a family rather than the ruler of an Empire."

"It is to show you, after my death," wrote the Emperor, "that I have loved you during my lifetime that I leave you this instruction as a rule of life by which you should regulate your conduct

[1] Bishop of Orléans to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, Oct. 6, 1768; found by Comte de Pimodan in the Archives Générales de Bruxelles.

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according to the principles that have guided me. . . ." He then goes on to enjoin on them sincere attachment to their religion and to the Almighty, "through Whom alone we can obtain eternal life, and true happiness in this world and the next. . . . An essential point is, never to be led away by what you know to be wrong, or to regard anything bad as harmless. . . . The world in which you are to spend this life is transitory—eternity alone is infinite: this reflection should prevent our becoming too much attached to our earthly existence. It is in innocency alone that we can enjoy the pleasures of life: directly they lead to harm of any description whatever, they cease to be pleasures, and become sources of pain and remorse. . . . We are not here merely to amuse ourselves . . . God has provided such as a means of relaxation (un délassement de l'esprit)." The Emperor goes on to deprecate too much luxury, which in a Sovereign weighs heavily on the subjects—"although I do not mean to say that we should not live in conformity to the state to which God has called us . . ."; then enjoining "extreme care in the choice of friends" and moderation in friendship, he proceeds to speak of his "horror of high play" and advocates charity to the poor, family affection, and loyalty to the Head of the House—ending up with reiterated references to steady preparation for death.[1]

The last reference sounds prophetic in view of the "thunder-clap" (as an eye-witness described it) of the writer's sudden death in August, 1765. Judging by previous references to palpitations, the cause would seem to have been heart-disease, about which he had been warned in vain. He and the Empress had proceeded with their family and

[1] Quoted by Monsieur de la Rocheterie in his *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, vol. i., p. 8.

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an immense retinue to Innsbruck in August, 1765, in order to attend the wedding of their son Leopold (Grand-Duke of Tuscany), with the Infanta Marie-Louise. On their return from a gala performance at the theatre the Emperor was seen to falter while ascending a private staircase, and stagger against a door. The King of the Romans and a Chamberlain, Count Reinhach, who were following, rushed to his assistance in time to catch him as he fell heavily forward, almost overpowering both, and he actually expired in their arms. It became the painful task of the poor son, unstrung as he was, to keep the Empress away, and to break the news that all was indeed over. In the first flush of grief she refused to be comforted for the loss of the husband to whom, in spite of his faults, her heart was inalienably given. But as time went on, her splendid health holding out and with it her strong mind reasserting itself, she once more took up the reigns of power.

Mischief-makers assured her that the heir-apparent was the last man to be satisfied with the secondary place in the government. Her uneasiness, coupled with her grief at his new title, quite overcame her; and when mother and son met for the first time after the catastrophe, she greeted him in a voice broken by sobs as "Your Majesty." "Never that to you," he exclaimed, falling on his knees and kissing the hem of her dress, "always Joseph, the most faithful and devoted of all your subjects." There can be no question of his deep affection and unbounded admiration for her, but the position was a very hard one, and produced inevitable friction at times, and difficulties with which the Chancellor had too little patience. The Emperor was fond of speeches that hurt his mother, great as were her efforts to conceal her feelings. "It is true that my presence

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is of little use here," he wrote to the young Queen of France on one occasion, "where I am the fifth wheel of the coach—so that although several details relating to the service of my Sovereign are entrusted to me, I cannot always count with certainty on executing the projects I may form."[1] This was his attitude all through, and he devoted the greater portion of his exceptional energy to the reform of the army. The Empress took this quite calmly when informed by her ambassador that the letter had been read out to him by Marie-Antoinette herself: "The expression in the letter of the Emperor to my daughter that he is only the fifth wheel of the coach here is no novelty to me: it is an ordinary phrase he uses in the company he frequents."

Years before, when the Emperor Charles VI. lost his only son, Leopold, a boy of seven, the bereaved parents fixed all their hopes on the elder of two little girls. The Emperor's life-work, the establishment of the Pragmatic Sanction, was designed to pave the way for the accession of Maria Theresa to the exclusion of her cousins, daughters of the late Emperor Leopold the First. She was strong and tall for her age, with a remarkable character and a bright handsome face, the colouring recalling that of her beautiful mother—Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick Wölfenbüttel. When she grew up, it was only natural that innumerable aspirants for the Archduchess's hand should present themselves; nearly every Roman Catholic Prince in Europe considered it his duty to present himself on the chance of finding favour in the eyes of the fascinating heiress. It is said that Frederick the Great had some intention of proposing for her hand. His religious obligations sat lightly on him, and it probably did not trouble him

[1] Emperor Joseph II. to Queen Marie-Antoinette, November, 1776.

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much to be told on the best authority that the Archduchess had a horror of the very sound of his name. But Charles VI. soon received a hint from the Powers who had supported him in his time of need that the balance of power in Europe would be best maintained by the marriage of his heiress with a member of a non-reigning house.

This was the Archduchess's opportunity — for there can be no doubt that she had already made up her mind on a matter of such vital importance to herself. The arrangement between Charles VI. and Duke Leopold (related to the Imperial family through his mother Marie-Eléonore, daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand), which involved sending Francis to Austria at the age of fifteen, contained no definite promise of an Imperial crown in the future. "He was then," said his father's intimate friend, President Lefebre, "an amiable boy with a ready wit and good inclinations, but his petulance was remarkable, and he appeared incapable of any application." His mother noted with satisfaction that he was "treated like an Archduke," and under Count Cobenzl as Governor the young Prince's education proved a conspicuous success. A brief sojourn at Nancy with his mother on the death of Leopold, in 1729, was followed by a longer visit to Versailles, where Louis XV. received his distant relative with attentions that could only be explained by premonitions of a destiny already prophesied. When the engagement was definitely announced, the joy of the Regent was changed to mourning— for one of the conditions was the cession of Lorraine to France. "My son cuts his own throat and that of his family by signing that unhappy treaty"; and Francis himself refused to sign away his birthright. "Monseigneur," said an Imperial secretary (Barkenstein), "no cession — no Archduchess"; and that argument carried the day. The marriage

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was celebrated at Vienna on October 12, 1736, and on the death of Jean Gaston, the last of the Medici, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Tuscany set out for Florence. The illness of Charles VI. (October, 1740) necessitated their return to Vienna, where four years later Maria Theresa bestowed on her brother-in-law, the popular and beloved Prince Charles of Lorraine, the Governorship of the Low Countries with the hand of her only sister, now twenty-five years of age. The happy *ménage* came to a sad and sudden conclusion; for the tragedy of 1817 at Claremont, which plunged a nation into mourning, came to pass long before at Brussels, and to the inexpressible grief of Prince Charles and the Empress, the Archduchess Marie-Anne and her child were buried in one grave.

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CHAPTER IV

ABBÉ VERMOND

HARDLY any two writers have been thoroughly agreed as to the personality or the rôle of Mathurin Vermond, son of a village surgeon—what used then to be called an apothecary. It has been said that he was an excellent example of an *abbé de société* who "commenced the work of the States General between the double doors of salons like d'Espagnac and Delille, whose picture we see in old prints of the date, leaning over a gilt and lace-draped dressing-table to whisper soft nothings in the ear of a lovely Marquise at her toilette, or the centre of a gay party drinking chocolate out of Sèvres china on the terrace of some Château near Paris." Monsieur de Goncourt says that he was like one of those "perfect *farceurs* with piercing eye and sceptical smile, who raised a *feu de joie* round the old religions."[1] It may be considered the height of presumption for a foreigner to venture to disagree completely with such an authority. I have thought that with Vermond were hidden the clues to many mysteries, and I have studied him with infinite care. In the first place he was ugly and clumsy; I do not for a moment believe he was very clever, and considering the innumerable occasions on which Comte de Mercy praises him in letters of

[1] *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, p. 47.

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which Vermond could never have known, I am inclined to think he was that *rara avis*, an honest man. His letters, of which I only wish more were accessible to the student, are bald in expression and ungraceful in style, but for those who wish to peep behind the scenes, they possess a value that is entirely lacking in many grandiloquent effusions or high-sounding phrases. He was thirty-four when he went to Vienna and had a certain simplicity which was thoroughly appreciated at that Court, and which, when he returned to France, was immediately attributed by his compatriots to immeasurable cunning.[1]

Vermond — de Vermond by courtesy only — arrived at his destination provided with the following letter :—

The Minister to the Marquis de Durfort

M. the Abbé de Vermond, who will have the honour to give you this letter, has been summoned to Vienna to be attached to Madame the Archduchess Antoinette in the capacity of Confessor. He is a man of merit and mind, who unites prudence to enlightened views, and who will certainly fulfil to the satisfaction of H.M. the Empress-Queen the functions confided to him. . . .

Directions follow to the French ambassador to do all in his power to assist the Abbé with advice and

[1] The impression I had formed of Vermond's personality, in contradistinction to such authorities as MM. de Goncourt, was lately corroborated, in one particular at least, by a fragment of a letter addressed to Comte de Mercy by one Gontier from Vienna :—" I have twice seen here, at the Baron van Swieten's, the Abbé de Vermond, arrived from Paris for the Archduchess Antoine (*sic*). He is very well treated at Court, and considers the Archduchess could not be improved on. He seems astonished that we do not talk more and better French at Vienna, and that the booksellers are not fully provided with works in that language. As to the last he was asked whether a large choice of German books was obtainable in Paris : and as to the first he might be answered that the French, who ought to be perfectly acquainted with their own language, make mistakes of the most obvious description." This letter was found by Comte de Pimodan among the Correspondence Mercy-Argenteau in the Archives Générales de Bruxelles.

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to tender any help he might require on his arrival in a strange country.

I am at a loss to explain to myself or to any one else his extreme dislike to fulfilling his ostensible task of confessor. It is certain that he abandoned it before very long and restricted himself to secular labour only, and, in fact, to the work of a tutor, a functionary not ordinarily forming part of the household of a young lady after she is married. But they did strange things in France in those days. His début is best described in his own language :—

MONSIEUR—I cannot sufficiently thank Your Ex. for the honourable mission procured for me. H.M. the Empress bestows on me daily fresh marks of goodness, and the charming character of H.R.H. (*sic*) renders my work about her person very agreeable indeed. After devoting my first instructions to the object of acquainting myself with the turn of mind and of degree of H.R.H.'s knowledge, I arranged the *précis* of the objects and method of learning I considered most useful to Madame the Archduchess. I included religion, the history of France, and I laid stress on everything connected with or characteristic of our manners and customs, on acquaintance with great families (especially those occupying places at Court) together with a general colouring of French literature: and in all these instructions I included particular attention to the French language and spelling. In order to diminish the wearisome nature of the studies, I keep them as much as possible to the forms of conversation. I cannot speak highly enough of the docility and good-will of H.R.H., but her liveliness and the frequent distractions militate insensibly against her desire to learn. It is to be desired that the limit of the term of her education were more distant. This can only be said to have commenced with the eight months she has spent with Madame de Lerchenfeld. The Archduchess herself told me that the Grande-Maîtresse, by whom she was brought up, was very fond of her and spoilt her without troubling her to apply herself in any way. Her Majesty the Empress has had the goodness to approve, in terms most flattering to myself, the plan of instructions submitted to her. She permits me to present myself every Saturday morning in order to render an account of the results and successes, and from that moment it was decided

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that H.R.H. should accord me an hour daily for her studies. The Archduchess extends this favour frequently by permitting me to assist at her conversations. I profit by calling her attention to phrases and constructions of phrases of which some are more German than French. It would be very difficult for her to reach perfection here beyond a certain point; it would be necessary for her to speak and to listen to French only—pure French—which is impossible here, where everybody talks three languages.

I must speak strongly on the point of the goodness and justice of the Grande-Maîtresse. I have tried to deserve this by the confidence I consider I owe to her. I have found in her no difficulties or any of those prejudices that so often spoil educations. Although the delicate health of the Grande-Maîtresse occasionally obscures the good humour desired by H.R.H., I am convinced she would find it difficult to meet with any one who would suit her better. The severity of Madame de Lerchenfeld makes a great impression on the Archduchess, but does not prevent her being fond of and much attached to her. I have surmounted for the time I remain here my repugnance for the confession according to her Majesty's views. I can only assure Y.Ex. that my disinclinations for that function have been greatly diminished by the goodness and singular confidence shown me by H.R.H. I began by hearing her confessions for the Christmas fêtes. . . . I am quite convinced that the Court and nation will be enchanted with our future Dauphine: to a charming face she unites every grace of deportment, and if, as one may hope, she grows a little, she will have all the advantages to be desired in the case of a great Princess: her heart, her character are both excellent, she only requires ease of expression in order to exhibit the admirable talent of her august mother for saying the most gracious things.

I have taken the liberty of having sent to Your Ex.'s address some books necessary for H.R.H.'s instruction. I desired to tender to you my thanks, and cannot any longer postpone expressing my gratitude or the joy I feel in the excellent qualities of Her Royal Highness.—I am with due respect, Your Ex.'s very humble and obedient servant,

THE ABBÉ DE VERMONT.

VIENNA IN AUSTRIA,
21st Jan., 1769.

This does not read like the letter of a very deep or indeed of a particularly clever man. He has

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apparently added "in Austria" because a small provincial town in France is called Vienne; and, as may be seen, he is more convincing when he speaks of his plan of lessons than when he touches on worldly matters, with which his acquaintance was evidently of the most perfunctory. Madame de Lerchenfeld, as he calls her—Countess Lerchenfeld; Maria Walburga, *née* Countess Trautmansdorff—was Mistress of the Robes to the elder Archduchesses (Oberhofmeisterin).[1] She took over the charge of Marie-Antoinette from the latter's own State Governess, Marie Judith, Countess Brandis, on whose shoulders was cast the responsibility for a great deal of her pupil's backwardness and want of application. Whether this is the case or not, it is hard to say, for most writers of lives of Marie-Antoinette, written after 1828, founded their opinion of this detail on those recorded by Madame Campan on the strength of some gossip she picked up from the tutor of Prince Kaunitz's children. She declares that the Empress sent on one occasion for various drawings and specimens of her children's caligraphy, in order to see for herself what progress they were making in their studies. When praised by her mother, the youngest little girl volunteered the statement that her own drawings had been extensively touched up by the drawing-master, and her writing done over a copy previously traced for her. Considering how great was her own and her brothers' and sisters' awe of their mother, and the horror that nearly all children have for a disturbance in which they feel the novel sense of responsibility, it was a valiant proceeding, but is consistent with the straightforwardness and honesty that Comte de Mercy and Vermond so often mentioned as being one of the most salient

[1] The Abbé is mistaken in calling Gräfin Brandis also "Oberhofmeisterin," but he was very hazy about Court titles, foreign or otherwise.

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qualities in their charge's character. The celebrated Mesmer was her writing-master, but he taught her German, so rarely used, whether in writing or speaking, in her after-life. It is only perhaps on two occasions that even in her private letters to her mother she uses the language dear to the Empress's heart. Six years after her marriage we find her answering a letter (not forthcoming), but evidently describing a small illness of Maria Theresa, obliging her to defer a visit to Gorice :—

I badly wanted to be reassured on all the details that my dear mamma has the kindness to tell me about her health: I hope she will not be long "gründig"[1] . . . it was necessary to tell me, for I should never have supposed it from her charming letter: if my dear mamma still suffers from "le splin"[2] I only know one remedy, so successful with all English people, and that is to come to France. . . .

The reply ran :—

Madame, my dear daughter, the remedy for "le splin" that you propose so prettily might reconcile me to that disagreeable and inconvenient ailment and cease to fight against it, and the German word you wrote so well, in which I recognize once more the hand of Mesmer, gave me no less pleasure.

The numbers of forged documents that flooded the bookshops of Paris, Vienna and London, when, after the Restoration in France, a reaction set in, and every scrap of Marie-Antoinette's writing was eagerly sought for, renders extreme circumspection on the part of the conscientious writer not only advisable but obligatory. There is, however, a very early (undated) letter of hers in existence, published on authority which I

[1] "Gründig," or its more modern form "gräntig," is an Austrian provincialism for "out of temper." Marie-Antoinette had evidently written the word in German characters.

[2] "Spleen" ("le splin" in French memoirs) seems to have been an eighteenth-century malady of the same class as "the vapours," common to both sexes when bored or out of sorts.

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should be the last to question.[1] It is a complimentary note on a birthday or New Year's day, to "my very dear Brandis," and the page is embellished by various flourishes with a kind of double frame done in ink round the margin, while faint pencil tracings still show under the writing itself. Countess Brandis was not likely to have addressed this effusion to herself; nor would one imagine Mesmer inclined to descend to such petty practices. It was probably done under the auspices of some under-governess or writing-master anxious to give pleasure to an engaging, if idle, pupil of eleven years old.

We shall see that Vermond struggled manfully with her bad writing and worse spelling, without very much result before she left for France, which is not so surprising considering that his instructions were limited to one hour a day, when six would have hardly sufficed. Her writing formed itself very late; and is much above the average in the examples that have been handed down, and are undoubtedly authentic. She certainly returned the fondness of Countess Brandis, and that lady wrote frequently to Versailles, keeping her informed of all that went on in the Imperial family. These letters were cut short by the Empress (who feared "indiscretions") in 1773, evoking a burst of tears from the lonely little Archduchess, who at the outset had treated the matter lightly to Comte de Mercy, probably from a desire not to attach importance to what might be objected to, as, indeed, it was—rather unwisely, as it now seems. Maria Theresa directed the brothers and sisters to write regularly instead, but they do not appear to have done so to the extent desired by the one member of the large family who was completely isolated,

[1] *Lettres de Marie-Antoinette*, by Monsieur de la Rocheterie and Marquis de Beaucourt (2 vols., Paris, 1895).

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and who after leaving Vienna only saw one sister and three brothers again, whereas most of the others could meet one another and visit the Empress in her own dominions once a year at least. A chance allusion made by the Empress to Mercy leads me to think that the correspondence was resumed at a later date.

It would appear that all the elder princesses had been educated under the direction of Gräfin Lerchenfeld, who seems to have exercised a strong and benignant influence over her charges. Archduchess Marie-Caroline begged to be transferred to her care from that of the lady who the Empress designates "la Brandis," and this was done just about the time that the Court was plunged in mourning by the death of the Archduchess Josèphe. "Charlotte," as that young lady always signed herself, and Marie-Christine were the favourite daughters of Maria Theresa, who always considered that the first most resembled herself in character, a likeness not borne out by her after-history. The future Queen of Naples only profited for one year by Gräfin Lerchenfeld's guidance, as the wedding-day came in 1768, followed some months later by that of the wilful and erratic Archduchess Amélie, whose departure for Parma entailed endless worry on the poor Empress.

Whatever mistakes Marie-Caroline may have made in her life, and especially as regarded its political side, she was unquestionably one of those exceedingly lovable characters that call forth a wealth of affection in return for what they so unstintedly bestow. It is hard to reconcile the opinions of English statesmen—fortunately few are expressed in the terms used by Lord Thurlow—on Marie-Caroline with the expressions of admiration and attachment that fill the letters of her mother

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and Marie-Antoinette. Neither time nor distance interfered with the love of those two sisters for one another, although they never met again in this world after 1768, when the elder was fifteen and the younger three years less. Marie-Antoinette was, so to speak, sandwiched in between two brothers; she seems to have been very fond of Ferdinand, and to have cared least for Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, in some respects the cleverest of them all, who left Vienna just before his father's death.

We must now return to the Abbé's diffuse and slightly provincial outpourings, which afford much insight into the details of that family life of which so little is known. Again, addressing Comte de Mercy—"I can but confirm the hopes I had announced to Your Excellency on the happy qualities of the Archduchess Antoine. If I was highly satisfied at Vienna I am even more so at Schönbrunn." He then proceeds to describe the arrangements for his commissariat, the Empress having issued orders on the point that ensured to the grateful tutor the company of those he chose to invite, and safeguarded him against the questions of the "indiscreet, idle, and inquisitive," which, as he was a great talker, was just as well. His "private table" seems to have been very well attended to; by the Empress's desire, it united "the magnificence of the Sovereign with the attentions found in private houses." As to the "indiscreets," he added sapiently, "one finds these in every country: it seems to me far more agreeable to keep away than not to answer." Few countries could produce more "indiscreets" than the Abbé's own, and, setting agreeable intercourse aside, returning no replies probably presented many difficulties to such a chatterbox as he, with little polish and no charm, and at his fingers' ends none of the agreeable

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nothings and *banalités* in which his compatriots excel every other people in the world.

Your Ex. is not unaware that their Royal Highness's existence is more retired at Schönbrunn than in Vienna; especially as regards Madame Antoine (*sic*), separated from her sisters by the difference in age and need of instruction. From the outset of my stay here at Schönbrunn I have been permitted to spend with the Archduchess all the time that is not occupied by her masters. I cannot describe to Y.E. to what an extent this young Princess shews me daily goodness and attentions, joined to a dread of incommoding me. She has, however, no doubt of the pleasure I feel in being near her. I was infinitely flattered by the true and *naïve* answer she gave lately. Her Majesty, inquiring how she spent her time, had the kindness to add: 'You are too exacting with the Abbé.' 'No, mamma; I see quite well that he likes it.' I wish this style of living could continue until the departure: I gain in conversation what the vivacity of H.R.H. makes me lose in the actual lessons. On the eve of St. Anthony, Her Majesty gave a very fine fête for the Archduchess at Laxenbourg, and had the goodness to direct that I should assist at it. Never have I spent so agreeable a day, H.R.H. really enchanted everybody. Her deportment, general tone, and her observations were universally applauded; Monsieur the Prince de Kaunitz, who had not seen her for a long time, was quite astonished. You can judge, Sir, how much pleasure his approbation gave to Her Majesty. The fête at Laxenbourg lasted from dinner until half past eleven at night—public tables, heron shooting, games, illuminations and fire-works. H.R.H. attracted universal attention and applause: her deportment and walk acquire an air of nobleness and majesty astonishing for her age. If she grows a little the French will require no further indications by which to recognise their Sovereign.

The sentiments inspired by the goodness of H.R.H. do not blind me to what will still be wanting at the time fixed for the departure. If her health and good-will do not fail between this and then, I trust nothing essential will be missing, and that in many respects she will be found very much above her age.—I have, etc. etc.

SCHÖNBRUNN, 21*st June*, 1769.

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The best French historians[1] have accepted Vermond's authority for saying that Marie-Antoinette was called "Madame Antoine" at the Court of Vienna. But if this was the case its use was practically restricted to Vermond himself, and to the ambassador, Monsieur de Durfort, whose compositions, as we have seen in the previous chapter, were not up to the standard of French Ministers—Choiseul, for example, or his colleagues, or even of such foreigners as Comte de Mercy and the Swedish Baron Stedink, whose style has elicited encomiums from Monsieur Geffroy himself.[2] Monsieur de Durfort also calls the other Archduchesses "Madame" so and so: and the Abbé was equally ignorant of the German language and of the customs of Courts—those of his own he only knew by hearsay—where "Madame" was invariably employed as the equivalent of the English "Princess," or "Royal Highness," the German "Prinzessin," "Kōnichliche Hochheit," and the Austrian "Reichsgräfin." As a matter of fact Marie-Antoinette is never alluded to by Prince Kaunitz or Comte de Mercy, who was the pink and quintessence of ceremonial, otherwise than as Archduchess Antoinette. She was christened Marie-Antoine—Mary-Antonia—but, as the youngest of a large family so often is, was called by its diminutive. The fact of Prince Kaunitz using it shows that in the Empress's immediate entourage it was habitual. Vermond was himself aware that styles and titles were not his strongest point. As he said to Comte de Mercy, "Y.E. knows my zeal—when I have the honour to write I forget all forms and think only of what I have to say," which is one of the reasons

[1] The late Monsieur Geffroy, Monsieur de la Rocheterie, Marquis de Beaucourt, among them.

[2] *Gustave III et la Cour de France*, by Monsieur A. Geffroy, vol. i., p. 353.

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why his letters are so interesting. He called his pupil "H.R.H.," which before her marriage by proxy she could not have been, and the lady of honour "Madame"; of whom—in those days, when an impenetrable barrier was kept up between the *noblesse* and *bourgeosie*, and the most ceremonious terms obtained between equals and friends—that *grand seigneur*, Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, always spoke as Madame la Comtesse de Noailles.

The authors of the publication *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette* speak of a picture of her, as a child, done by the excellent artist, Gabrielle Bertrand,[1] of whom the Empress is said to make an "unceremonious mention" as "la Bertrand." There is nothing more unceremonious in this than in any other use of a locution to which Maria Theresa was addicted. Not to mention (among a hundred instances) a reference to a charming lady, born a Colloredo, married into another great family, as "la Palfy," all her children (excepting, of course, the Emperor) figure in her letters in this style—"la Marianne," "le Ferdinand," etc. "La Marie," she wrote in 1768 to the friend of her own childhood, Comte Sylva-Tarouca, "is very ill, and l'Antoinette has convulsions: she has been unconscious for an hour." The marvel was that any children lived to grow up, considering the way they were treated when they were ill. What a fate the little Antoinette would have escaped had she passed away in that long fainting-fit when she was eight years old!

With the opening of the year 1769 the lengthy negotiations that preceded every royal marriage were in full swing. The Court officials had plenty of practice, as for some years these weddings were an annual occurrence. On the 1st of July the

[1] It is possible that the picture reproduced facing p. 199 of this work is the one in question. It was incontestably in the Empress's possession.

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Chancellor had a long interview with Monsieur de Durfort, when the preliminary programme of the documents to be drawn up and the order of the various pageants were arranged. From Compiègne the contract was returned by Louis XV., with some alterations for the Empress's consideration.

A selection from Vermond's letters was printed for the first time about fifty years ago; a number are said, by those who have read them, to be too dull for reproduction. They have never, as far as is known, been translated into English or used to any extent in English books. Their authenticity is beyond a doubt, filed as they were with the private papers of the able diplomatist to whom they were addressed. They serve, among other purposes, to afford abundant proof, if any were needed, of the enormous danger of sending so childish, so backward, and above all so attractive a girl into an existence that a woman of the world of two- or three-and-twenty would have found a high trial.

Towards the end of that year (1769) Comte de Mercy was expected in Vienna:—

Although your Ex. is so much wished for here, I can safely say that no one awaits his arrival with more impatience than myself. Her Majesty has had the goodness to inform me that Y.E. will devote some of his evenings to Madame Antoine. Nothing could be more useful at the present moment and with regard to the future, and I observe with pleasure that H.R.H. appreciates the benefit. I hope that on many accounts Y.E. may be enchanted with the Archduchess. Strangers, and those who have not seen her for six months, are struck by her physiognomy, to which fresh attractions accrue daily. One can find faces that are more regularly beautiful: I do not think it would be possible to find one that is more pleasing.

Whatever impressions may have been given in France by those who have seen her here, every one will be surprised at the signs of goodness, of affability, and gaiety that are imprinted on that charming countenance. The Archduchess

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will say the most obliging things to every one. I wish she would accustom herself to discrimination in her attentions: I work hard to this end, without troubling myself overmuch about the trifling small jokes that are made on her French education by persons who are annoyed now at encountering a manner more suggestive of goodness than familiarity. . . . I rely on Y.E. finding in the Archduchess the greater part of the knowledge one could desire at her age. She is cleverer than she was long thought to be. Unfortunately, that ability was subjected to no direction up to the age of twelve. A little idleness and much frivolity rendered my task more difficult. I spent the first six weeks in drawing an outline of the construction of "belles lettres." She easily understood when I presented my ideas in a connected form: her judgment was nearly always sound, but I could not accustom her to get at the root of a subject, although I felt she was very capable of doing so. I fancied I could only get her to fix her attention by amusing her. I began the history of France, but I only employed it as a background ("comme d'un canevas") on which I could work up all the objects it is necessary to know in the ordinary course of life. Excepting the history of recent times, I only called her attention to important facts, especially to epoch-making occurrences in our habits or Government. I profited by every opportunity of giving her ideas on the arts, on laws and customs: I rather tormented her by my questions on the reign of Henri Quatre. When I came to a position that would have been embarrassing to a prince or princess, I always waited after explaining the circumstances, and made her say what she would have done in their place. I had to lay stress on this, and I had the pleasure of remarking that she often took the right view.

Madame the Archduchess has made great progress in history, and the sequence of her ideas assures me that she will never forget essential points. I venture to let Y.E. know that Her Majesty, having had the goodness two months ago to descend to the apartments of the Archduchess, heard her (her lessons) for two hours, with as much surprise as pleasure. The explanations she gave proved to H.M. that it was no effort of memory and that the Archduchess was extremely capable of reasoning and judging for herself, especially in questions of conduct. You can easily believe, Sir, that in my instructions I laid special emphasis on the lives of our Queens, especially those of the House of Austria.

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The Archduchess took great interest in these, and estimated the principal events of their lives very correctly.

We are now finishing the reign of Louis XIV. H.R.H. is already familiar with French names: she has some idea of genealogy: the journals of the reign of Louis XV.[1] will add to her knowledge, and assist me in giving her an idea of the important places about the Court and in the Kingdom while accustoming her to the names of those who fill them. "Elle s'amuse quelquefois avec l'état militaire de la France;" I am certain that shortly after her marriage she will know the colonels by name, and will distinguish each regiment by its number from the colour of the uniforms.

The Archduchess talks French with ease, and fairly well. She has freed herself from a number of incorrect expressions: there remain certain faults of construction ("quelques mauvais tours de phrase") which she will herself correct promptly when she hears no more German, or the bad French of the people who serve her. She would rarely make mistakes in spelling if she could only give her undivided attention. When I look over her writings I have only to indicate a word with the point of my pencil and she immediately recognizes her mistake. The style of her handwriting is not particularly good: what is most vexing is that partly through idleness and inattention, partly also, as it is thought, owing to faults of her writing-masters, she has acquired the habit of writing inconceivably slow. As nothing that can prove useful to H.R.H. seems to me to be beside my duties, I often occupy myself with this ("j'assiste souvent à ses écritures"), but I own that on this point I have made the least progress.

I informed the Bishop of Orléans eight days ago the details of H.R.H.'s height. From the 13th February to the 5th October she has grown considerably.[2]

Vermond concludes by saying that his "commissaire de Paris" has had instructions to leave at the Hôtel of His Excellency "quelques bagatelles," which, presumably, he hoped the ambassador would bring. That gentleman arrived in Vienna in November, and returned to his post in February,

[1] If correct these could hardly have been profitable from any point of view, public or private.

[2] Abbé Vermond to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, Oct. 14, 1769.

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only leaving Paris just in time to meet the Dauphine at Strasbourg and attend her to Versailles.

The Abbé's pointed allusions to the bad French he heard in Vienna lead one to suppose him to have been comfortably unconscious that his own inability to speak a word of any language but his own might profitably temper his criticisms of the linguistic deficiencies of others. A true Frenchman, he gallicises proper names, and his "Madame Antoine" I regard as a figment of his own brain, or of that of Monsieur de Durfort, who probably dictated it. The Dauphine signed herself "Antoine" for the last time in a ceremonial letter to the sister she never cared for—the Duchess of Parma—announcing the marriage by proxy.

In the month of October the *Gazette de France* announced that orders had been issued from Vienna concerning the repairing of the roads by which the Archduchess must travel: it is to be hoped, judging by the experiences of Queen Marie Leszczynska on a similar occasion, that the French Government acted on the hint. Towards the end of October the Empress graced with her presence a masked ball, at which four thousand persons assembled. As the Royal family proceeded slowly through the rooms, the crowds pressed closer and closer to gaze eagerly not only at their revered Sovereign but also to see the future Queen of France. An eye-witness said: "The Empress already walked with the difficulty engendered by an *embonpoint* that increased with years. The day of her beauty and brilliancy was past: her countenance, marked by smallpox, had lost its former charm and showed traces of the emotions produced by an illustrious but laborious reign, joined to an expression of weariness and lassitude chiefly due to her last and greatest trial—the loss

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of a dearly-loved husband. The contrast of the child beside her suggested a rose-bud in all its freshness and beauty."[1] Who in all the crowd could have imagined what Fate held in store for "the rose-bud"? Beside the tragedies of life, its trivialities strike us as strangely incongruous.

Vermond, ugly, clumsy, and conscientious, in his black *soutane*, with his repetitions and his pencil (he was just the kind of person who would have never made a sharp point), went plodding steadily on, resuming his discourses after the ambassador reached Paris.

"Had Y.Ex. been able to remain a fortnight longer in Vienna you would have found H.R.H. far more disposed to talk, and to listen. The two first days of Lent sufficed for repose of mind, and to remove all ideas of dancing, balls, and carnivals. *On m'a beaucoup parlé*" (this form of speech is invariably employed by Vermond when he alludes to his Royal pupil: he perhaps gets as weary as his translator has done of his efforts to be ceremonious); "I was much spoken to of M. the Comte de Mercy and in such a manner as to prove that his conversations had created an impression." Here follows an obscure phrase on recommendations, which I take to refer to Marie-Antoinette's over-readiness to pass on and endorse petitions. She was more than good-natured, for she had so kind a heart that any one who was poor or in real trouble had only to urge claims to assistance to have them invariably supported, although they were too often based on visionary foundations. We know what trouble this proclivity brought in after life on one who, unlike the generality in this cold hard world, was guided by her own generous nature in lieu of mundane considerations.

The Abbé resumed :—

[1] *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Madame Blaze de Bury, 1868.

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The tone of the interior of the private apartments remains much as Your Excellency saw it—in many respects it is greatly improved. The Grande Maîtresse is sometimes mortified on the score of her jurisdiction, and on what "*on*" calls quite openly "her curiosity"—then she is mollified by a thousand charming attentions shewn to her and hers. According to the custom of this Court the Archduchess must make a retreat of three days before her departure. Y.E. can easily imagine that the meditations will not be very long: I am much afraid that the devotional readings and exhortations that I must make cannot be much longer: nevertheless these must fill three days when H.R.H. will see no one. It was proposed to make the retreat at the end of this month . . . but H.R.H. prefers Holy Week. Her Majesty consented: her approaching departure will make her (the Archduchess) more attentive to whatever I say, and more disposed to reflect and to answer questions. She imagines she has so many replies to give that she said to me before the Grande Maîtresse: "I shall perhaps want more time to give you all my ideas. . . ." The day before yesterday she made me remain after the lesson, to play at one of those little games where one whispers a question to one's neighbour. The small circle was composed of the Grande Maîtresse, her two daughters, Madame de Burgaus and myself. After the first round the Grande Maîtresse was embarrassed and said she found it difficult to speak in front of H.R.H. "Ah, Madame, you were determined that I should ask questions of Monsieur de Mercy before everybody! Monsieur l'Abbé, you can tell him this when you write." The expression, arch and gay, with which this sally was accompanied was even more telling than the words themselves.

The cavagnol takes place twice a week and is a marvellous success. T.R.H. (*sic*) the Archdukes come and converse, the Ambassadors of Spain and Naples are included in the game, and the room is entirely filled with spectators. The Archduchess does not devote an instant's thought to the game: she wants to see all that is going on, and to bestow some mark of attention on everyone; she succeeds in doing so. This large company gives her the best manner and tone possible, everyone is enchanted, and Her Majesty appears to me to be quite satisfied with all that is reported to her. The other five days of the week the Archduchess has a little lottery, with about ten or twelve persons. The Emperor comes without fail directly the game is over: and is more

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satisfied with the conversation to which the Archduchess begins to lend herself. Formerly the retiring time was a quarter past nine, sometimes even nine o'clock, now it is later, sometimes even ten. The Grande Maîtresse is occasionally filled with admiration, nearly always with surprise. As for me, I am penetrated by the goodness of the Emperor, and the charming manner in which the Archduchess makes me promise not to fail to attend every evening.

Then Vermond relapses into a dissertation on a certain Abbey for which he hoped the Bishop of Orléans would nominate him on the recommendation of Comte de Mercy, and which apparently now possessed a revenue of just double the amount previously mentioned by the applicant as being in every way suitable. He little knew what treatment awaited him at Versailles, or, while pluming himself on the special travelling-carriage placed, by the Empress's orders, at his sole disposal from Vienna to Strasbourg, that his request for a similar privilege during the French part of his journey would receive no attention whatever. In fact the expenses were not even paid for months after the poor Abbé had been left to convey himself and his belongings through France as best he could.

In the winter the Archduchesses were in the habit of driving in sledges, and the Empress and the French ambassador went out on to a balcony to watch "the little bride," as her mother called her, passing by. The unfortunate Monsieur de Durfort was nearly frozen, and the Empress recalled the following year what his sufferings had been—exposed to an icy wind, probably insufficiently protected, and naturally precluded by considerations of etiquette from looking miserable, as he felt. "Not having been incommoded myself," said the Empress regretfully; the fact being that her health obliged her to live in a gale of wind, to the horror of Prince Kaunitz, who was exceedingly

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what is called in France *douillette*, always fancying he had been or was about to be attacked by some mysterious ailment. To mention the fatal termination of an illness in his presence rendered him silent and moody for the whole day, and the remotest allusion to smallpox sent him into a mild frenzy.

But time was getting short for Marie-Antoinette, and her sledging and parties of pleasure were never more to be indulged in before a people who loved and understood her.

The Court of France received the last notes relative to the nuptials in January, and a week later the Dauphin's ring was received by the Archduchess, who put it on for the first time on the 21st of January, the anniversary of the day twenty-two years later on which she became a widow.[1] On the 16th of the following April the French ambassador arrived in the greatest state in his gala equipages, and, received by the great officers of the Imperial household, was ushered into the presence of the Emperor Joseph II. and the Empress-Queen, to whom he made a formal demand for the hand of the Archduchess Antoinette in the name of the Most Christian King, on behalf of his grandson and heir. Consent being graciously accorded, the heroine of the day was summoned to the hall of audience or throne room, and having been informed by the Empress that her fate was decided, was presented with a letter from the Dauphin by the French ambassador, after which the Grande Maîtresse of the Empress affixed to the bride's shoulder a portrait of the bridegroom-elect, mounted in diamonds and fastened to a ribbon like an order.

This ceremony terminated, they all adjourned to the Court theatre, where a piece by Marivaux

[1] *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette*, by Comtesse d'Armaillé.

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was followed by a ballet expressly composed for the occasion by the great *maître de ballet*, Noverre, who had been sent from Paris to teach Marie-Antoinette to dance, and who, if he was responsible for her manner of curtseying, needed no other claim to the distinction he possessed. The 17th was the occasion of another ceremony, when was read out by the Chancellor an act of solemn renunciation by the Archduchess of all territories of the Empire and the two Kingdoms—as well, add the chroniclers conscientiously, as those on the father's side: but as the latter consisted of Lorraine, which had been impounded years before by France, and Tuscany, of which the Grand-Duke Leopold had long been in possession, it is to be presumed there was a certain amount of form in the last clause. Marie-Antoinette took a solemn vow on the Holy Scriptures, afterwards inscribing her signature in the presence of the Austrian officials, witnessed also by Monsieur Gérard, permanent head-clerk at the French Foreign Office, and Monsieur Bouret, a private secretary to Louis XV. and a follower of his master in more respects than one.

On the 18th a splendid fête was given by the Marquis de Durfort at the Palais Lichtenstein, where a mock Temple of Hymen had been erected in the gardens, brilliantly illuminated, while a display of fireworks on a large scale excited general admiration. At six o'clock on the evening of 18th April, the Court proceeded to the Church of the Augustins through a gallery of the Palace lined by a double row of Grenadiers. This was the marriage by proxy—the dress rehearsal of a ceremony which could only take place at Versailles, and which, coming twice over, must have been singularly trying to Royal débutantes. Beside the bride, magnificently arrayed in cloth of silver, with a

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long train, walked Maria Theresa, who afterwards placed herself on the dais with the Emperor, while the supposed bridal couple knelt in their places. The service was performed by the Papal Nuncio, Visconti, and was followed by a Te Deum, when the firing of guns informed the good citizens of Vienna that the ceremony was over. In French works[1] it is occasionally stated that the Archduke Ferdinand "had the honour of representing the Dauphin"—a slight confusion of ideas. The office of proxy at a Royal wedding sometimes devolved on any specially distinguished subject to whom the sovereign might wish to pay some signal mark of attention, and this was then the formula employed. But in the case of the Emperor's brother, there could be no question of his "having the honour of representing" anybody. The pseudo-bridegroom was a boy of fifteen, who was perhaps chosen because he had been Marie-Antoinette's special playfellow, and whose own marriage to the heiress of the d'Estes took place in the following year. Two days later—the 21st of April—at half-past nine in the morning, Marie-Antoinette started for France.

Aware of the risk of jeopardising the alliance, the Empress knew that any delay in the celebration of the marriage by proxy, however cogent might be the reasons for keeping the bride in the safe environment of her own home, was too hazardous a measure to attempt. That extraordinary mixture of lethargy and volcanic action, Louis XV., was capable at any moment of changing what he was doubtless pleased to call his mind, and marrying off his boy grandson incontinently to another of the numerous candidates—possibly one of the late Dauphine's nieces in Saxony—all keenly on the look-out for a chance of supplanting

[1] *E.g.* in *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette*, Part I. (Jan., 1909).

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the Archduchess and of obtaining a share in that splendid prospective throne.

Prince Kaunitz also had causes for uneasiness which he is nearly certain to have kept from the Empress. Both felt that the one hope in the situation lay in the Dauphin, of whom not very much at that time was known with any certainty. One Argus-eyed observer in Paris could but report what he considered his duty impelled him to divulge, and months before he had written what was undoubtedly a warning, and contained a menace for the future :—

> Some people attribute present events to softening of the brain, with which the King has long been threatened. Whatever the cause may be, the effects will doubtless be the same and of a nature to determine the decadence of this Monarchy, which can only rise up again provided the successor of the reigning King repairs by his qualities and talents the extreme disorder in the kingdom. But if appearances are to be believed, this resource is little to be depended on; less because the heir-presumptive is being brought up by an incapable and vicious man,[1] than because Nature itself seems to have denied everything to the Dauphin. This prince, by his expression of countenance and his remarks, exhibits very restricted intelligence ("un sens très borné"), much ungracefulness, and no evidences of feeling; he appears inclined to avarice, which by certain persons is construed into partiality for method. . . . It seemed necessary to inform Y.H. of details which I shall expose to no one else.[2]

There can be no doubt that the Empress was much more alive to the gravity of the situation than she naturally allowed to appear. It was perhaps merciful that, situated as she was, obliged to use a daughter barely past childhood as an integral part of a policy, the future was hidden from her. Only six years later, when a beautiful Queen of twenty was demonstrating the inevitable

[1] Duc de la Vauguyon.
[2] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, May 3, 1769.

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effects of the evil influences of Versailles, Maria Theresa was writing to Vermond:—

I am indeed touched by your services and unexampled attachment, but also very moved by the state of my daughter, who rushes, surrounded by base flatterers who urge her in their own interests, headlong to her undoing. In these circumstances, my daughter needs your help. . . . Mercy and I hope you will not refuse to fall in with our wishes, and that you will endeavour to retard your departure till after the winter: if, by then, nothing has changed, I could not exact new sacrifices on your part . . . and on all and every occasion I shall feel for you esteem and gratitude. . . . *P.S.*—Being lodged at Schönbrunn, in the rooms my daughter occupied, I find myself in the same place in which you held your conversations. Imagine how I am affected by this. . . .[1]

Had the Empress a vision of a face never to be seen again by her in this world, of blue eyes turned so wistfully to the flowers and the sunshine, of the quick little half sigh that responded to Vermond's reminder, of the fair head bent so reluctantly over the lesson-book? Racked by anxiety, it was well indeed if, in the bitter hour of their last parting, the mother never realised the extent to which her child needed help.

[1] Empress Maria Theresa to Abbé Vermond, enclosed to the Austrian Ambassador, Oct. 1, 1776.

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CHAPTER V

VERSAILLES AND MME. DU BARRY

QUEEN MARIE of France—commonly called by her family name of Leszczynska,[1] probably in order to distinguish her from her predecessor Marie de Médicis—was married at the sensible age of three-and-twenty, unlike so many foreign princesses who came to France as brides direct from the nursery or schoolroom. She might very possibly have succeeded in extending the domestic felicity and the virtuous ascendancy of the outset of her married life into far later periods, but for the wicked influences brought to bear from outside on a husband eight years younger than herself. She was unusually accomplished and had been carefully educated by Stanislas, the dethroned King of Poland (indemnified by the nominal gift of the Duchy of Lorraine), of whom she was the only and dearly-loved child. Her letters and writings prove her to have possessed excellent judgment, sound principles, and plenty of common-sense. She was, moreover, unusually witty. Some one once observing that the *liaison* of the King with the Duchesse de Châteauroux had been chiefly effected through an intriguing Princesse de Conti, elderly heroine of innumerable past scandals—

[1] In spelling this formidable name I have all through adopted the orthography employed by Monsieur Casimir Stryienski, the able historian of Marie-Josèphe de Saxe.

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"That old coachman still likes to hear the cracking of the whip," remarked the Queen quietly. Some of her sayings have passed into proverbs, and have been carefully preserved for the edification of posterity by the little circle of admirers who did their utmost to fill and brighten the later sad and empty years wherein Jeanne Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, usurped the place and the prerogatives of a virtual Queen of France. "What was my amazement," said Prince de Ligne, "when, after the round of bows I had to make to each member of the Royal Family in turn, I found myself conducted to a kind of second Queen, who had far more the appearance of one than the first!"

The letters of Stanislas to his daughter have been published and are very pleasant to read: "You are my other self, and in my thoughts you dwell as in my heart, seeing that I only live for you"; and elsewhere, "In Heaven's name preserve your dear health, for that is my chief concern in this world," and so on through pages filled with panegyrics on his incomparable "Maryneczka." No wonder that in a life like hers such a father played the principal part, and that when he died from the effects of an accident, his daughter, still in the first flush of grief for the loss of her only and dearly-loved son, was left inconsolable. "As for me," she wrote, "I am sad, and shall remain so all my life; my only consolation consists in thinking that those for whom I weep would not, if they could, return to this vale of tears. . . ." Little more than two years elapsed before she was destined to follow both her dear ones to the grave.

Towards the end, as her daughter-in-law observed, the Queen alternately stuffed and starved, and faithfully pursued a species of regimen that leaves one in a perpetual state of surprise at the

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powers of endurance of the contemporaries of one's great-great-grandmother. One of her chief pleasures consisted in her evening game of "La Poule" in the apartments of the Duchesse de Luynes, where, surrounded by a little court — including Cardinal de Luynes, besides the Duc and Duchesse, the Duc and Duchesse de Chevreuse, President Hénault, and a few more—Marie Leszczynska conversed happily from her armchair drawn up before a big round table. These peaceful evenings, or more probably the stuffy, closely-shut rooms, acted as a soporific on these elderly ladies and gentlemen, and long before the hour of breaking up and attending the Queen on her return progress, the entire company fell sound asleep.[1] The Cardinal was generally the first partially to rouse himself and, still only half conscious of his surroundings, to demand in impressive tones "that the Chapter should assemble." His loud voice awoke the Duchesse de Luynes's old pet dog, who considered it an excellent opportunity for dozing in a corner to a regular accompaniment of loud snores, which speedily gave place to excited and wheezy barking. According to Mr. Creevy, this indecorous behaviour on the part of "Tintamarre"[2] was followed, nearer our own day, in very different Royal circles.[3]

Besides getting through a large quantity of fancy-work—she made nearly as many quilts as

[1] *Mémoires du Duc de Luynes* (Paris, Didot, 1860), quoted by MM. de Goncourt, *Madame de Pompadour*, p. 8 (Bilschays, 1878).

[2] It is unnecessary to explain to the reader that "tintamarre" means a hubbub. Some of the pet animals had curious names: for example, the Duchesse de Choiseul's pet sheep was called "Cathédrale."

[3] After dining at the Pavilion at Brighton on one occasion Mr. Creevy remained to supper, at which figured "a broiled bone" (and, in all probability, something stronger)—"the result of which was that, having fallen asleep myself, I was awoke by the sound of the Duke of Norfolk's snoring. I found the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Clarence in the midst of a very animated discussion as to the particular shape and make of the wig worn by George II."—*Creevy Papers*, edited by Sir Herbert Maxwell (2 vols., John Murray, 1903).

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poor Mary, Queen of Scots—Marie Leszczynska kept up a large correspondence and was fond of drawing. There hangs—or used to hang—in the Grand Trianon an example of her draughtsmanship in the form of a picture of a landscape and a farmyard, beneath which appears the date and the signature of the artist: "Marie, Queen of France."

It is to be feared that those among the eight daughters who survived were little real comfort to their mother. The only one who married was the survivor of twins who arrived first, and she, Louise-Elisabeth, always called "Madame Infante" (her husband being a son of the Bourbon King of Spain), became Duchess of Parma. She made frequent appearances at Versailles, where she died of smallpox in 1759. The love of Marie Leszczynska's joyless life was her only son Louis, the Dauphin, who strongly resembled herself in looks. Like her he was above the average height, with square shoulders and her upright character. He was painted more than once by La Tour, and if these are faithful likenesses he must indeed have changed from the pretty little boy with the peaches in his first portrait by Belle.

So much depended on this child, whose fragile existence, as long as it was preserved, averted any approach of that special bogey of the French Bourbons—the danger, as they regarded it, of the Spanish Succession. His mother never ceased to mourn the two-year-old baby, Duc d'Anjou, whose grandmother on her side had no thought beyond the Dauphin. To that Comtesse d'Andlau in whose hotel at Strasbourg the exiled queen and her daughter spent the weeks preceding the latter's wedding, Catherine Opalinska addressed some letters conveying breaths of purer air than the vitiated atmosphere of Versailles, of

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far-away Poland and the healthy family life of another country and race. The little heir-apparent is—

so pretty in his first breeches and *justaucorps*. . . . Our amiable Louis defies description, I love him to distraction. He not only promises to live, but to become famous. He enters into everything, wants to know everything, nothing escapes him . . . as soon as he sees a pretty face there is no peace for any one. He likes full-dress. They told me yesterday that he complains to every one he will look like *un charbonnier* (a coal-heaver) when he is in mourning for King Victor. With that he likes everything military, and seizes on all occasions of warlike display. When, through a window, he sees the King going out hunting, he demands a horse on which to accompany him. He is great friends with his mother, and always has secrets to whisper in her ear. . . .

At fourteen he displayed very bellicose tastes, and was in despair at being left behind when Louis XV. departed in great state for Lille on his way to Flanders. The poor Queen was in an agony of anxiety, especially as her desire to join the expedition had been declined on the ground of expense.

"You cannot mind, mamma, my not wanting to stay with you," said the Dauphin; "the young de Montauban who is little and weak is gone, while I who am tall and strong am left behind. I can't think why the King did not take me."[1]

Louis XV. knew very well, and had no intention of risking the life of one in whom so many hopes were concentrated. He seems to have been little known during his lifetime; he was thought heavy-looking, and was certainly devoid of the tastes for which Bourbons were celebrated. He was strongly addicted to philosophy and specially affected Locke. At the same time he was sincerely religious; the many writings he left and his notes on

[1] *Le Dixhuitième Siècle*, by Monsieur Casimir Stryienski.

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the education of his children demonstrate his love of truth, his feeling for justice, and his deep sense of responsibility. "If I ever have the misfortune to reign—" was his customary beginning.

It is said by an author who is admirably qualified to speak, that the Dauphin would have shown more firmness and consistency if he had been placed in the circumstances that overwhelmed his unfortunate son; but that, although the first Louis, had he lived, might by his actions and character have retarded the Revolution, he would have been unable to avert it altogether.[1]

When it became evident that the Queen's days were numbered, Louis XV. exhibited symptoms of rather tardy remorse. He devoted more time to her than he had done for years, sat with her every evening and listened with great attention to everything she had to say. Those who knew the King best, among them the few, such as the Ducs de Noailles and de Choiseul, who had his welfare and the dignity of the Crown at heart, augured well for the future; even if the Queen's life could not be preserved, they began to hope that this belated reassertion of an influence once so strong held promise of a reputable termination to the domestic side of the King's life. How little they knew! How impossible it was then to foresee that what must always be regarded as an unequalled scandal was already "within measurable distance of fact"! The Queen died in June, 1768, leaving four unmarried daughters severally and collectively quite incapable of filling her place, for if her influence had been imperceptible during her lifetime, a certain value could not be altogether denied once it was finally removed. The recently published memoirs of the Duc de Cröy voice contemporary opinion: "This respected princess who had only

[1] *Le Dixhuitième Siècle*, by Monsieur Casimir Stryienski.

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done good merited the regrets of the nation: the goodness of her character was portrayed on her gracious countenance." The King exhibited considerable decent if rather conventional sorrow for his loss; but it is doubtful whether that strange, weak character was susceptible of any lasting impression for good. The great apartments at the head of the marble staircase were hung in all the trappings of woe, the regiments of servants exchanged their gorgeous liveries for unrelieved black. Louis XV. appeared little in public; he visited his daughters occasionally, he hunted and shot with his customary regularity, and the strange routine of his journeys from one Royal palace to another, arranged and notified by himself on the 1st of January for the ensuing year, remained unaltered. So, apparently, did his tastes, for this short period of tranquillity proved in the sequel to be only the lull before the storm.

On the 1st of November of that same year the Austrian ambassador in Paris reported in a private letter to the Imperial Chancellor that "a creature"[1] had begun to make occasional appearances at Court, in the wake of which she travelled to Compiègne. Provided there with a private house and fine carriages, she shortly exchanged these advantages for lodgings in the Fountain Court at Fontainebleau. As time went on the servants and equipages multiplied, the liveries became more gorgeous, and when on Sundays and fête days the unknown appeared in a ground-floor reserved tribune at the King's mass, his household began to inquire what all this portended. They were accustomed to hearing the King inveigh against morganatic marriages in general, and that of Madame de Maintenon in particular: aspirants to the place of Madame de Pompadour, although fairly numerous, were

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, Nov. 1, 1768.

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given no inducement to remain, nor, indeed, was that remarkable woman likely to have a successor exhibiting a tithe of her talents or embarking on any analogous career. The miserable participators in Louis XV.'s degraded life were politically non-existent, but here was one drawn from an even lower class than the denizens of the *Parc aux cerfs* who was fated to play a large part in his last shameful years, to bring about the downfall of a great Minister, and to influence for ill the fortunes of the daughter of an Empress-Queen and the bride of a future King of France.

At first no one seems to have taken this new development seriously; but Comte de Mercy's attention was not to be diverted by the opinions of those far less well informed than himself as to what went on in the privacy of du Barry's own apartments. His secret information opened his eyes to the real state of the situation. She herself started speaking openly of her political *rôle*, and the use her approaching presentation would enable her to make of the King's favours by calling his attention to abuses in the Government. A cabal began to take shape, and to pay some attention to this strange addition to Court circles, whom they soon regarded in the light of a possible weapon for intrigue. One of their number approached the Princesses, two of whom were not prepared with an opinion, the third considering that, "however indecent such a presentation would be, it was on the whole preferable to the dangers of the introduction of a new Queen." Inexpressibly bitter to these silly middle-aged ladies was the idea of yielding their precedence to a young and pretty rival.

Comte de Mercy's apprehensions now assumed an active form: he decided to warn Choiseul through an intermediary, and for that purpose convened his only intimate friend, Comte Fuentes,

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the Spanish ambassador, who rose at once to the occasion. Besides interviewing Choiseul, Comte Fuentes drafted a letter to his own Court which, certain to be intercepted and copied on the road, was intended to serve the double purpose of enlightening, not only Charles III. of Spain, but also his cousin the most Christian King on the heated condition of public opinion. To the surprise of both ambassadors, Choiseul, who saw each separately and had no idea they were acting in concert, took the matter lightly until talked into a more reasonable frame of mind by the two foreigners, who made no secret of their opinion of the gravity of the situation. Two days later, in a long conference with Comte de Mercy, the Minister showed signs of veering round to the opposite extreme. The scandal had become public property—"all France is occupied with and sighs over it." Choiseul, now thoroughly roused, spoke far too openly to every newcomer; the ambassadors were obliged to appeal to the good sense of the Duchesse de Gramont, who assisted them in preventing her brother rushing off and giving a piece of his mind to the King. "Mesdames" were in despair at having been "taken in," as they expressed the inevitable result of their own narrow-minded folly. Paris was placarded with seditious documents alluding in unequivocal terms to the possible resuscitation of Damiens and Ravaillac. Of these treasonable utterances Comte de Mercy took so serious a view that Prince Kaunitz asked him to despatch an example to Vienna; but they were mostly written by hand, and no one, except the police, dared touch them for fear of accusations of complicity.

Madame de Durfort reported to Comte de Mercy that, after talking of nothing else for a week, the old Princesses had decided that the only chance of detaching their parent from his undesirable

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associate consisted in the second marriage they had hitherto so strenuously opposed. The lady-in-waiting insinuated the name of Archduchess Elisabeth, and reiterated the terms in which the proposal would be successfully conveyed to the King, and Comte de Mercy chimed in with the advantages to the Princesses of such an acquisition. The diplomacy of "Mesdames" was not of a high order: the King hummed and hawed and was obviously ill at ease. However, water wears the stones, and the combined attacks of three daughters served to wring a reluctant promise to ask for the hand of the Archduchess "provided her face was not of a displeasing kind." He did not deign to enter into any detail as to his standard of female charms, which, judging by those of Mademoiselle Bécu, was probably of the vulgar order. In order to reassure his mind on this point, the great painter Drouais was requested to set out at once for Vienna.

Were "Mesdames" taken in? Madame de Durfort was not so easily duped; she fancied she saw in this amenity a cunning desire to keep du Barry quiet and to lull the suspicions of the Princesses pending the incredible presentation of the adventuress at Court. Comte de Mercy told Prince Kaunitz that he himself shared these suspicions. Madame de Durfort had sworn him to secrecy, and Choiseul was apparently unaware whence the suggestion came, having just been asked by Madame Adelaide whether it was he who had formulated the proposal to the King! The Duke was also sceptical as to its value (he had good reason, judging by his memoirs, for knowing his master's tastes), and Louis XV. now ordered the Minister to replace Drouais, whose charges were excessive, by another painter available at once for the execution of the portrait of the

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future Dauphine. To Choiseul, who, as he was aware, knew him fairly accurately, he did not mention her elder sister, and Comte de Mercy wrote to Prince Kaunitz that, with the exception of Madame de Durfort and Comte Fuentes, he doubted the sincerity of everybody all round. As a matter of fact "Mesdames" were incapable of achieving any object even in their own interest —a motive power apt, in the absence of brains, preternaturally to sharpen dull wits. "I own to you," wrote the Chancellor, "that when I hear of these horrors I congratulate myself on being here, where I am bored, in preference to being, as you are, where one is amused."

The opposing cabal, eagerly on the watch for an explosion, were obviously disconcerted by the Duke's unexpected mildness. They had counted on what is vulgarly called a "row," ending in a total rupture.

Madame du Barry's presentation dress was ready by the end of January, and after passing several hours daily in her company the King went on to his daughters' rooms, where he entertained them at great length on his re-marriage. M. de Choiseul, with those bewilderingly abrupt transitions from deep depression to high spirits peculiar to certain temperaments, astonished the level-headed Comte de Mercy as much by his excitable fears as by his groundless security. Meanwhile the public murmurs and the scandalous comments daily increased: the members of *la haute finance*, with Monsieur de la Borde at their head, intimated their own approaching retirement. No wonder. In place of the three hundred and twelve millions composing the King's nominal revenue they were confronted by a deficit of thirty-eight millions, and this although the same taxes as those customary in times of war were in full operation. "The provinces are ground down,

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and everything is absorbed in private interests; in short, both as regards morals and finance, the present Government has ruined the kingdom, and it will take a very long time before any recovery is possible." Comte de Mercy was right. It took about forty years of storms, of which even he, with all his acuteness, had no perception, to clear the atmosphere.

"Drouet," as they all called him, probably had no intention of obeying a half-hearted command to proceed to Vienna; in fact it is not unlikely that secret instructions accompanied the ostensible orders, for he was soon busily engaged in painting two portraits of Madame du Barry, a detail which could hardly fail to catch Comte de Mercy's eagle eye. Nearly all that year and the following one, months after Marie-Antoinette had arrived in France, Louis XV. maintained the farce, and showed bad taste of which one would hardly suppose that elderly Solomon capable. Even while ordering apartments to be prepared for his future spouse he was busying himself in arranging for the presentation of his favourite, as to whose antecedents the Duc de Choiseul had not failed to enlighten him. "The public knows all these circumstances: the King is not ignorant of any, but his passion surmounts the shame of presenting to his family and placing on a par with the nobility of France a creature of this description."[1] The day this letter left Paris for Vienna Nemesis seemed likely to overtake the evil-doer. Hunting in the forest of St. Germain the King fell from (not with) his horse, loudly proclaiming that he was killed, and when this was disproved declaring that his arm was fractured. He was carefully transported on a litter to Versailles, where the doctors certified that no bones were broken; but

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, February 1769.

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his nerves were in a shocking state, and the sudden cessation of exercise in the open air, reacting on a shattered system, soon reduced him to a dangerous condition. His head doctor, Sénac, confided under seal of strict secrecy to a friend that if the King were prevented from resuming his rides he would run imminent danger of softening of the brain, with which he had long been threatened. But with such an object as du Barry's presentation in view the King had no intention of departing this life, and by the 21st of April he had quite recovered his health, if not his mental equilibrium, and announced that on the following day "one presentation and one only would take place." Of this Madame Adelaide had been warned, three or four days before the accident, by that pillar of piety, the Duc de la Vauguyon. He was coldly received.

"Is this by order of the King?"

"No, Madame, I am desired by the Duc de Richelieu to communicate this to Your Royal Highness." Before the sentence was concluded the Princess had turned her back.

Speaking of this special Court function a distinguished contemporary author adds, "and never was a prettier woman presented." But to accept this statement literally would be a reflection on the fair Parisians. An excellent judge of female charms wrote after his first sight of her: "She is pretty when you consider her, but so little striking that I should never have asked who she was." Mr. Walpole had no special liking for crowned heads, and scant respect for the "still handsome King," whom he saw that same year in the tribune at the chapel at Versailles surrounded by priests; down below and close to the altar sat Madame du Barry, "not having made her toilette and without paint or powder." It is very difficult to

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decide the question of Madame du Barry's claims to beauty, so differently is she described.[1] That her portraits flatter her there can be little doubt: Drouais, as a courtier, knew how to please the doting King. One is disposed to imagine her as being of medium height, rather short than otherwise; but Admiral Sir George Collier, who saw her several times about three years later, distinctly said that she was tall, adding that she was stout, with a large neck, what he called a "fine woman, with an air of vulgarity which could never be got the better of."

Presentations were awe-inspiring proceedings of considerable length, but Madame du Barry was not likely to shrink from an ordeal entitling the débutante to such privileges as those of driving in the King's carriages, supping in the private apartments, and in short, residing in the royal palaces. These were all favours rigidly denied to those who were excluded from the formal receptions by the etiquette that took the place of morality. The procedure was always the same. The lady, splendidly arrayed, and driven in the grandest equipage she could command, arrived with her social sponsor. They would then proceed up the marble staircase, escorted by any friends who had the *entrée*, between crowds of spectators, closely watched by innumerable pairs of eyes, critical or admiring as the case might be. At the top of the staircase the couple passed through the Salle des Gardes, the first ante-room, the celebrated Œil de Bœuf (dating from 1701), so named on account of a window at either end of the shape called by French architects after a bull's eye. The King's room came next, opening into the Cabinet, on the threshold of which the

[1] The Duchess of Northumberland and Lady Mary Coke both endorsed Mr. Walpole's opinion.

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newcomer would make the first of three curtseys. Two more were *de rigueur* while advancing slowly up the room directly facing the King, who, surrounded by Ministers of State and members of his household, spoke a civil word or two, or occasionally merely responded by a rather freezing bow; after which the *débutante* was expected to make her slow exit backwards, repeating her three curtseys and keeping clear as best she could of her enormous train.

Louis XV. was in the habit of erasing with his own hand from the list of candidates some of the best names in France; in any case it was necessary to produce proofs of four hundred years' noble descent—all of which, however, did not prevent upper- and middle-class Paris rushing to see a *coureuse de passade*, the nameless daughter of a monk and a cook, masquerading as a great lady in a hundred thousand pounds' worth of Crown jewels. This astonishing spectacle was in part brought about by means of the unwilling assistance afforded by the name and chaperonage of a certain elderly and impecunious Comtesse, who was inveigled from the obscurity of impoverished circumstances and the sudden inaction of a *chaise longue* and a spurious sprained ankle, by the blandishments and pecuniary promises of the Duc de Richelieu, which over-rode the threats and remonstrances of her family and friends. Presumably to her own regret; for, deserted by any soothing recollection of her own and her late husband's unquestionably noble lineage, the unhappy Madame de Béarn was so overcome by her false position and her guilty conscience that this luckless descendant of Merovingian kings had, as the Duc de Choiseul indignantly remarked (and he ought to have known), all the appearance of a *tante d'emprunt*. Her embarrassment was not less

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noticeable than the demeanour of the *ci-devant* Jeanne Bécu, *alias* Vaubernier, *alias* Mademoiselle l'Ange of the rue de la Jussienne, who, carefully coached by an expert dancing-master, played her part in the proceedings with a success as noticeable as her indomitable courage.

The morning following "this shameful scene," as Mercy rightly called it, Prince de Beauvau, Captain of the Guard, a near relation of the House of Lorraine, was informed by the King that that potentate was exceedingly anxious to see the portraits of the Empress's daughters—"especially that of Archduchess Elisabeth, *his future spouse.*" When the pictures arrived and were duly displayed in his private Cabinet, the Bishop of Orléans, gazing intently at the three fair pretty faces, was sadly disconcerted (and having no reply ready wisely held his peace) at the King saying suddenly, "No doubt the Empress expects me to make some reference to the Archduchess Elisabeth in my letter."

But all this was quite insufficient to allay Comte de Mercy's suspicions:—

> In the chaos of intrigue we are in here, what seems least doubtful is that the King has never spoken in good faith on these projects for his re-marriage. On the other hand, Monsieur de Choiseul, seeing himself in an embarrassing position, would have no scruple about compromising Courts or individuals if by so doing he could extricate himself ("se tirer d'affaire"). It is, I conclude, with this motive that he encouraged the King to hope for an interview with the Archduchess Elisabeth. . . . I have always regarded these projects as ill-timed *persiflage*, very unfriendly, too, towards our august Sovereign.[1]

These quips were undoubtedly in the worst possible taste. Poor Princess! Beautiful, good and charming, she surely deserved a better fate

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, Feb. 4, 1769.

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than to have no refuge from the dull existence she loathed except a marriage where in its preliminaries her name was bandied from mouth to mouth in conjunction with the horrible sobriquets of a du Barry!

The great ladies who had not scrupled to frequent the supper-parties of Madame de Pompadour and had most assiduously kept the King company during his months of widowerhood, now begged to be excused from attending those special functions. When the lists for the moves to the various palaces were submitted for approval, the names of the Duchesses de Gramont and Choiseul, Comtesse de Brionne, Princesse de Beauvau, the Duchesse de Pecquigny and the Comtesses d'Egmont and de Ségur were promptly erased by a Royal pencil. "This is the first stroke of the birch-rod," wrote a shrewd observer, "and it produced its effect. The Duc de Choiseul was presented to the favourite, and Madame du Barry is seated on the rock, the embodiment of virtue."

She was genuinely anxious to establish friendly relations with the well-known Minister. The attributes that had established his phenomenal success with the opposite sex were not likely to escape a woman of her kind; moreover, she was not then so firmly established as to warrant her defying the man who to all appearance controlled the destinies of France. It would have been difficult at that time for the most far-sighted onlooker to foresee the eventual result of the duel between them. Long afterwards, at a London dinner-party given by Mr. Thellusson, the banker, she sat next to Gabriel, Duc de Choiseul, to whom, discussing the old French Court and his uncle's career, she enlarged on the genuine nature of her liking for that brilliant person—a liking turned to dislike and eventually to a stronger feeling by

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his coldness and indifference. Some of the very women who had played so large a part in his success now contributed no less prominently to his fall. The Duchesse de Gramont—of whom it was said that it was only possible to adore or to detest her—led the anti-Barry faction with her usual violence and utter disregard of all prudential considerations. She was followed in a quietly timid manner by her brother's wife.

"I understand the Duchesse de Gramont," said Mr. Walpole, who had no high opinion of that lady's moral character, "but you, Madame, can afford to be more magnanimous." He followed the march of events in Paris with close attention, making the most of his visits to the gay capital, and on his return to Arlington Street and the comparative seclusion of Strawberry Hill, was kept informed of proceedings over the water by his old blind friend Madame du Deffand, who, from the recesses of her *tonneau* as she described her big chair, devoted a great deal of attention to the affairs of her relatives. Mr. Walpole's letters are too well known to be copied at length here; and their excellent translation by Comte de Baillon has brought the English writer the uncommon distinction of extensive quotation by such authors as MM. Gaston Maugras and Stryienski. These have formed a very just appreciation of Horace Walpole's social attributes, often so difficult for a foreigner to gauge, and the rank of life and nature of the experiences on which he founded his invaluable views of the society of London and Paris.[1]

Amid all the clamour and the diverse opinions revealed and recorded in the yellow pages of these

[1] In a comparatively recently published French work it is asserted that Horace Walpole was a banker. The horror of that fastidious aristocrat may be imagined, little as he foresaw the day when Peers of the Realm with historic names would head banking companies, and pioneer mining syndicates all over the world.

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old-time letters, it is clear that few of the King's *entourage*, however deficient in principle and lax in practice, were devoid of shame and regret at the evidences of his latest infatuation. Apparently the only person in whom these feelings were absent was one who in the heyday of a hot and intemperate youth had participated in the orgies of the Regency. "These old courtiers at least appeal to one's pity," commented Dr. Tronchin from his coign of vantage at the Palais Royale. "Here is a new scene that renews the youth of Maréchal de Richelieu—they say he walks on air, thinking no more of his white hairs than if his locks were ebony."

If the Duc de Choiseul concealed any part of his contempt for his old friend's proceedings, his self-restraint was solely due to the prudent counsels of Comtes de Mercy and Fuentes. The Duc de Richelieu had been indirectly the means of introducing Mademoiselle Bécu to the King, and was determined to maintain her in the disgraceful pre-eminence to which she had now attained. Why? He probably had no guide but his own depraved tastes and a consequent insight into those of his master. It is certain that he was devoid of the genuine feeling of the Ducs de Choiseul and Noailles for the dignity of the Crown, and had no comprehension of, or sympathy for, the pain it gave these old friends of Louis XV. to see him the laughing-stock of France, and in time of the greater part of Europe. One great family had no reason to love the Maréchal for his own sake. In his far-away boyish days, over fifty years ago, he had been married against his own inclinations to a child from a convent, Marie-Anne de Noailles, pretty, gentle and good, whose young life he had embittered for nine years by neglect and unkindness, until she died, happily

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for her, on the threshold of what might in brighter circumstances have proved a long and prosperous existence.

A far harder heart than that of Théodore Tronchin could not deny some commiseration either to these old courtiers. Madame du Deffand lamented the false position of those great ladies whose countenance and support the King had enlisted by very substantial means on his favourite's behalf. The men readily showed a facile adherence, but her own sex held back until every encouragement from the highest quarter authorised their patronage of one quite unfit to associate with the poorest scullery-maid of good character employed in their huge houses and unknown, even by sight, to the great ladies who owned these princely establishments. Almost the first to respond to Royal overtures was no less a person than Prince de Beauvau's own sister, widow of a Prince de Lixen,[1] now Maréchale Duchesse de Mirepoix, a confirmed gambler and spendthrift, entirely crippled by debt. It was a melancholy ending to a worldly prosperous, if not exactly edifying, career:—

> She is very *triste*—very troubled: she wants to put a good face on it, finding herself embarrassed for the first time in her life. I pity her, for she is humiliated by her own actions and by the triumph of those who decline to do likewise: she knocks at many doors for fear of finding herself alone. . . .[2]

Her own family broke with her, and many of her old associates, besides the Choiseul party, cut her dead. Her new friend's loudly-proclaimed affection for *la petite Maréssale*, as she called her, must have been a poor consolation for being practically ostracised by her own class. She was soon joined by Comtesse de Valentinois, a very

[1] Prince de Lixen was killed in a duel by Richelieu.
[2] Madame du Deffand to Hon. Horace Walpole.

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eccentric and erratic great-niece of St. Simon, who made mischief wherever she went, and who might with justice have been nicknamed "the stormy petrel." The last inhabited the Hôtel d'Onsenbray, celebrated for its salons and the splendid decorations of its gilded walls,[1] all, alas, destroyed by fire in 1771, the fatal year of the Commune.

The clique known as the "dévots," embittered by the exile of the Jesuits, now made overtures to "the cabal," by whom such promising recruits were eagerly welcomed. At the head of the "dévots" were the Duc de la Vauguyon and Madame de Marsan, who had at the outset loudly proclaimed their religious principles, declaring, to the natural indignation of Comte de Mercy, that Heaven permitted ills in order to remedy a greater misfortune—which misfortune (according to them) was the bare existence of their enemy, the Duc de Choiseul! Sustained by Richelieu and d'Aiguillon, they constituted Madame du Barry "the standard-bearer" of the party. What the King really thought of these strange proceedings is best gathered from an extraordinary letter found by Choiseul's nephew among the Minister's papers, and published in the *Revue de Paris* after the Restoration. It is in autograph and undated, and is generally attributed to the late summer of 1769—I should be inclined to place it a year later. It is evidently in reply to one from the First Minister, enquiring as to the truth of the persistent rumours of his own removal from the Government and the appointment of the Duc d'Aiguillon in his place. The first part will be quoted in its place later on; the King continues:—

You attend well to my business: I am satisfied with you: but beware of your surroundings, and of givers of advice: this

[1] *Comtesse d'Egmont*, by Comtesse d'Armaillé.

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is what I have always hated, and that I detest more than ever. You know Madame du Barry: it is assuredly not Monsieur de Richelieu who made her known to me, for although he knows her, he does not see her: the only time he did so for a moment was by my express order. . . . She is pretty, I am pleased with her, and I impress on her also every day that she should be careful of her surroundings and advisers, for, as you will readily believe, such are not wanting. She has no feelings of hatred against you, she knows your ability and bears you no ill-will. The outcry against her has been frightful—wrongly so for the greater part.[1] They would be at her feet if . . . "ainsi va le monde." . . . There is no need for me to impress caution on you as regards all this. My writing is no better than yours.[2]

We have already seen from the King's letter quoted in Chapter II. how strongly the idea of retirement had taken possession of Choiseul's mind after he had been First Minister for about three years, and in reconsidering his decision he predicted a *lettre de cachet* in the future. To a reproach on the subject of his extreme levity he had replied:—

Unhappily for myself, Sire, I am not slow to reflect, and am very prompt in execution—a drawback in the eyes of weightier people. . . . There is no levity in my principles, though in the manner there may be a little.

His enemies assured the King that Choiseul was dissipated and little addicted to work:—

When Your Majesty chose me for the Ministry I pledged my word to devote the few brains and resources I possess

[1] Here the King's inherent insincerity (or was it his power of deceiving himself?) becomes manifest. He had been told over and over again every detail of Madame du Barry's past by every one who dared to tell him the truth, and most frequently of all by the Duc de Choiseul himself!

[2] This letter was published with a facsimile of the original in the *Revue de Paris* in July, 1829, by Gabriel de Choiseul, the Minister's nephew and heir, with a view to disproving the obviously fabricated so-called "Memoirs of Madame du Barry."

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and all my fidelity to your service, but I did not promise that I would abandon the taste I have for pleasure or that I should prove faultless. . . . I am only dissipated when I have nothing to do. . . . It is not possible for anyone to say seriously that I do not work. I devote eight hours daily to my departments. The labours of the Foreign Affairs while I controlled them are nearly all carried on in my own handwriting . . . if I attempted more I should become dull and heavy and should work badly.

On the last and most important question of religion, he returned a fitting reply :—

It is not easy to attack me fairly on this serious matter, for I never speak of it. But in outward forms I adhere to undeviating propriety, and in the business of the State my principle is the support of religion. Your Majesty has probably noticed many instances of this.

As a matter of fact both he and the Duchess were what may be termed free-thinkers.

The Paris Exhibition of pictures called the "Salon," owing to its being held in a room in the Palace of the Louvre, was unusually crowded in the summer of 1769. Among many interesting pictures, some of which can be seen to-day at Versailles and elsewhere, two portraits attracted so much attention that Mr. Walpole (then on a short visit to Paris) could not see either on account of "the enormous crowds." Both the works of art in question were by Drouais, the one representing Madame du Barry in a kind of mythological garment as Flora, the other in an adaptation of a man's riding-dress. The original herself visited the Salon, attended by an obsequious train of painters and sculptors and sycophants of every denomination. Monsieur de St. Florentin had the rooms cleared—as they had been long before for Madame de Pompadour—in order that Mademoiselle Bécu and her train might promenade at ease. Baseness could go no further. For, whatever her moral deficiencies may have

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been, no more competent or appreciative judge and patroness of Art and Belles Lettres than the brilliant Marquise ever inculcated the love of, or set an example of, an all-absorbing taste for the beautiful.

Perhaps all this reminded one of the unmarried princesses of the time when large numbers had congregated in the same way to inspect Nattier's beautiful portrait of Madame Victoire, to be seen to this day in one of those ground-floor rooms at Versailles in which so much of her dull and trivial life was passed. In this splendid picture we can admire the soft dark eyes, and the majestic poise of the head, crowned with the abundant black hair, thrown into strong relief by the yellow sash that crosses her silver gauze gown. At the same place may be found the twins, by that past-master in the art of portraying Royal children, N. Bel (or Belle), who shines in his delineation of the two squat little figures in their long skirts. It may be remarked that the frontispiece to this volume shows what was probably intended to be a pendant to this, in the form of a fascinating picture of a pair of little brothers by the same master-hand. Not far off is the fifteen-year-old Madame Adelaide, haughty and unapproachable in rose colour, another triumph of Nattier, who painted all the princesses in turn.

That these princesses did not shine during their lifetime, and have not gone down to posterity as the most amiable characters in existence, is not really surprising. Louise-Elisabeth, the elder of the twins, was despatched at twelve years old to Parma and married to her cousin Don Philippe, son of Philip V. of Spain. The younger, Anne-Henriette, the flower of the flock, died in 1752 at the height of her father's disorders. "See," cried the public, "what it is to offend Heaven and

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render one's subjects wretched. God has taken away his beloved daughter." At their birth the King bestowed on each a nickname in turn. "Madame Troisième" did not live long to be known by her additional sobriquet of "Madame de Trop." Two little brothers followed, one only reaching manhood. Of the remaining five, Thérèse-Félicité died at Fontévrault when seven years old: the wonder was that "Madame Dernière"—Louise-Marie—lived to become a Carmelite nun, for she was conveyed to that celebrated abbey before she had reached the mature age of one. The condition of the exchequer removed all possibility of providing the princesses with dowries; and the only potential husband who voluntarily presented himself and was promptly dismissed, was the Duc de Chartres (later d'Orléans), like every one else, genuinely devoted to his cousin Madame Henriette.

All who knew Madame Adelaide in her early youth assert that she was then very handsome, as she was certainly clever: but at eight-and-thirty her good looks were a tradition, her tall figure had become gaunt, and her cheeks fallen in owing to the premature loss of some very large teeth. Her pride and haughtiness were unbounded, and only rivalled by her predilection for forms and ceremonies and her notions of what was due to a daughter of France. She considered the designation "Royal Highness" quite beneath her, and desired to be addressed (of course invariably in the third person) as "Madame" *tout bonnement*—a title reserved for the wife of the King's next brother. The princess was possessed of an inordinate opinion of the importance of Bourbons in the scale of humanity; she was convinced that these occupied a class of their own apart from the rest of mankind, even from the necessarily small portion that sits on

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thrones. She made many allusions to Bourbon characteristics, more especially referring complacently to their ingrained weakness and indecision. It probably suited her to ignore any inconvenient recollections of the Leszczynski and Opalinski, and the idiosyncrasies of those non-reigning families to whom Louis XV.'s Polish wife owed her descent. It is doubtful whether Madame Adelaide would have survived the shock of hearing how nearly her mother was affianced to Maréchal d'Estrées, and, after that project fell through, to the Duc de Bourbon. His granddaughter was quite incapable of realising how thankful Stanislas Leszczynski would have been at that time to see his dear daughter make what would have appeared to him an excellent marriage. Time had not softened Madame Adelaide's naturally imperious disposition, neither were strong prejudices and narrow views capable of modification in that contracted existence, denuded of all healthy interests.

Madame Victoire, considered by competent judges by far the best of the three sisters, was popular with her household; she was fond of comfort and good food, and was troubled (perhaps as a natural result of those tastes) by an ever-increasing *embonpoint*. She, too, had been handsome in her fleeting youth; while according to the vivacious Mademoiselle Genet, the princesses' "Reader" (afterwards better known as Madame Campan), Madame Sophie was disagreeable, awkward, plain, and so shy that nothing less than her special bugbear, a thunderstorm, could frighten her into good manners and ordinary speech: "Madame Sophie was of an extreme ugliness; I never saw any one look so startled. She walked very fast, and in order to recognise without appearing to look at those who placed themselves in her path as she passed, she had

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acquired the habit of casting side-long glances like a hare. She was so shy that it was easy to see her for years without hearing her utter a word."

Eighteen years or so before this, a better judge of looks than Mademoiselle Genet wrote a rather highly-coloured description of the return of the princesses from Fontévrault :—

> Mesdames Sophie and Louise arrived here yesterday: the King went in advance to meet them with Monseigneur the Dauphin and Madame Victoire—I had the honour to follow. Madame Sophie is nearly as tall as I: very goodnatured, stout, a beautiful neck: well-made and a good skin and eyes. Sideface she resembles the King as one drop of water does another; full face she is less like him, because her mouth is disagreeable.

Thus Madame de Pompadour, who was likely to know. As a matter of fact all the princesses lost their looks early in life, with the possible exception of Madame Victoire. Their education had been inadequate, and the immoderate spoiling of a certain Mère Macarthy was only partially counteracted by the excellent Madame de Soulanges, to whom, to their credit be it said, their pupils remained unalterably attached. Mademoiselle Genet declares she was told by Madame Louise that at the age of twelve that princess was unable to read: none of the sisters could walk downstairs without assistance, or turn the handle of a door for themselves. With the exception of music, of which the whole family and notably the Dauphin was very fond, and the trifling incidents that marked the petty routine of palace life, they had nothing to occupy their time, and their knowledge and experience were about on a par with those of a normal child of eight to ten.

Madame Victoire had a great admiration for Madame Adelaide, to whom she remained much

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attached, regardless of the intermittent warfare which raged between the heads of the various households, and the constantly recurring efforts of Madame Sophie to ally herself with her elder, at the expense of her more amiable, sister. They were incongruously if splendidly lodged in the large apartments occupied by the late lamented Madame de Pompadour, communicating with the King's rooms by one of those concealed staircases —narrow, dark, and ill-lighted—with which the Royal palaces, as well as the Paris hôtels of the great families, were intersected. The King's morning visits were announced by means of a bell which was rung in rotation, announcing to each daughter in turn a morning greeting, or the chance of partaking of coffee prepared by their estimable parent with his own hands. When Mr. Walpole saw the three princesses they were standing in a row, holding "knotting-bags" and enveloped in long black taffeta cloaks. He says they "looked embarrassed but good-humoured," which was all the more creditable inasmuch as their dinner was waiting—being kept hot on charcoal stoves in the ante-room, a proceeding ill-calculated to improve the taste and one most familiar at the present day to those Europeans who have visited or inhabited the East. Comte d'Hézecques, one of the King's pages, has left a picturesque description of the evening ceremony, when the princesses' processions passed through the vast, empty, silent salons and galleries—in their embroidered paniers and trains and their long cloaks, preceded and escorted by ladies-in-waiting, equerries and pages, the latter carrying huge flaring torches all the way —to the scene of the "unbooting of the King." That potentate's fondness for low company and for various forms of vulgarity showed itself in the nicknames he was so fond of bestowing on his

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children—Madame Victoire "Coche," in allusion to her figure, and Madame Sophie "Graille."

Madame Campan's assertion that he called Madame Adelaide "Loque" is rather discounted by the constant mentions of her in the recently published correspondence of her sister-in-law and special friend, Marie-Josèphe, by the curious name of "Torche." She also shared the excessive dislike of her brother and his wife for the Duc de Choiseul, although she afterwards declared herself his staunch supporter. That, however, she was incapable of being in the case of any one. Weak and imperious, haughty and insincere, she was responsible for a great deal of mischief, especially as, although she did not like Marie-Antoinette, she was perpetually interfering with her. It is impossible to account for the line she took from the first with regard to her nephew's wife. In what spirit Madame Adelaide prepared to meet Louis-Auguste's forlorn little bride may be judged from the following anecdote, perhaps too well known. The household of the new Dauphine was upon the point of starting for Strasbourg, when Monsieur Campan, who had been for years in the late Queen's service and had known the princess from a child, presented himself as in duty bound to ask her wishes.

"If I had any orders to give," was the reply, "they would have no reference to"—fatal expression —"*une Autrichienne.* I disapprove of my nephew's marriage."

How unconscious the Empress then was, and for nearly two years after, of the hostility that greeted her child on the very threshold of her new life, and from those who should have been the first to give her support and show her affection! At first she exhausts herself in attentions, directly by letter and in diplomatic compliments and messages through her ambassador, to that member of Marie-

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Antoinette's new family who, as the eldest daughter of a widower, occupied to a certain extent the place of a Queen. Marie-Antoinette was destined to encounter many implacable foes during the twenty-three years she spent in France: it is doubtful whether any were more inimical to her than this elderly relation, who was jealous of her and hated her before she ever saw her face. In common justice it should be said that the endless squabbles and scandals that relieved the monotony of these colourless lives were in a great measure due to the members of their respective households, whose principal occupation seems to have consisted in quarrelling among themselves, or in disseminating some spiteful tale about other members of the Court. Madame de Narbonne was a talkative and malicious member of a malicious society, but she shone by comparison with Comtesse de Marsan, who was capable of anything that gratified her spite, or her strong desire to be revenged on any one who crossed her path. She had little influence over the princesses, while that of Madame de Narbonne was all paramount. The latter even succeeded in obtaining from Madame Adelaide the large sums of money which the boundless extravagance of that gay but impecunious individual, Comte Louis de Narbonne, obliged him to secure as best he could.

The household of Madame Victoire—"incontestably the best of the three sisters, and having the most character," said Comte de Mercy—was presided over by Madame de Durfort, wife of the ambassador, who possessed qualities very superior to those of the majority of her colleagues. She was a friend of Prince Kaunitz and of Comte de Mercy, had discretion, an intimate knowledge of the Court, and little if any *penchant* for intrigue.

The princesses were not always so fortunate in

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their ladies. A sub-governess of Madame Adelaide had been relieved of her duties for the almost incredible reason that she either had not known that some mysterious person had provided the King's young unmarried daughters with an impossible book, or at any rate had not prevented its appearance. This book Madame Adelaide apparently found so much to her taste that she obligingly passed it on to Madame Henriette, who, older and wiser and by all accounts a very superior character, complained to somebody (the story was mainly composed of "somebodies"), who reported the matter to the King. A huge commotion ensued; but with the strange absence of common-sense that also distinguished the later prosecution, for misappropriation of large sums, of notorious adventuresses such as Cahuet "de" Villers and Madame Lamotte, matters that it was impossible to dispose of in too summary or too secret a fashion were blazoned abroad and discussed *à tort et à travers*. It may well be a matter for wonder how objectionable books were obtainable by young girls in such a position in life. The entire Court and public had ample opportunities of seeing and acquiring pernicious literature if so inclined by a perverted and pitiful taste. Each time any one mounted or descended the great marble staircase at Versailles, it was necessary to pass open stalls—covered with pamphlets, prints, and cheap wares of all descriptions—with which the walls were lined to the very doors of the Royal apartments themselves.

The volume in question made what is to be hoped was its last appearance about 1790, when Mr. Morris, the first American Minister to Paris, mentions that he sent a servant to borrow it from the Bishop of Autun—"rather droll to receive it from the hands of a reverend father." It is not altogether surprising that that ornament of the

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Talleyrand-Périgord family fancied the productions of Monsieur Jacques de la Touche, avocat au Parlement de Paris in 1750. But it is to be feared that the education of the princesses had been inconceivably bad. There is no doubt that Mesdames Adelaide and Sophie horrified the Empress's daughter by their manner of talking; and when they perceived this, they informed her—to Comte de Mercy's natural annoyance—that her own education had been "very severe"!

It is probably true, as Monsieur Stryienski observes, that we are far too apt to think of those times in the light of the atmosphere created by the magic brushes of Boucher, and later of Fragonard and Lancret. Life, even before the Revolution, was often very sordid, very ugly, very base. These picturesquely named and attired people did not always move about looking as they have been immortalised by Nattier and la Tour. The Duchess of Parma, "Madame Infante," who began a chequered married life at twelve years old, employed the words and terms of a cavalry trooper in her private letters; and Madame Adelaide related stories, with immense appreciation and gusto, that raised the hair on the head of even the least particular. All the same it is pleasanter to dwell on their better natures, or to people a world of one's own imagination with gallant shepherds and pretty shepherdesses against a leafy background of blue skies and arching green trees and running water. If it be folly to look on the "tender grace of a day that is dead" in preference to its material aspects, Heaven preserve us all from wisdom.

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CHAPTER VI

LUNE DE MIEL

Depuis que j'ai été à Rome, les vilains climats me sont insupportables, et les climats des cours sont, de tous les climats, les plus vilains.—DUCHESSE DE CHOISEUL.

THOSE excellent votaries of the turf who object on quasi-sporting, quasi-physiological grounds to two-year-old races would doubtless subscribe readily enough to the proposition that whoever brought about the marriage of Louis-Auguste de Bourbon and Marie-Antoinette-Josephine-Jeanne de Lorraine d'Autriche incurred no small measure of responsibility. Starting life practically at the head of the most splendid, luxurious, dissolute Court in Europe, a couple whose united ages fell short by a few months of thirty years, were more than likely to find themselves placed in situations which could hardly fail to be fraught with many and divers perils. Given admirable examples, judicious control and powerful support, it is possible that the heir-apparent and his bride might have emerged scatheless from an ordeal before which more mature judgments would recoil. A rapid review of the surroundings will suffice to demonstrate the absence of any one possessed of the means of assistance on which the young and inexperienced should depend. On either side the primrose path of the boy and girl was beset with snares and pitfalls: upon what help or advice was it possible for either to rely?

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Comte de Mercy-Argenteau had returned with Prince Starhemberg to the Austrian Embassy, leaving Vermond behind at Versailles to watch events and report progress. Possibly they found the latter's ignorance of Courts rather an advantage than otherwise; it may have been that the fact of his having no friends there (excepting the Bishop of Orléans) not only obviated the immense danger of indiscreet confidences, but tended to concentrate his attention on his virtual master and to devote his entire time to his duties. Even more probably, like most really great men, Comte de Mercy knew how to manipulate the most unpromising instruments of his good-will and pleasure when no more suitable agents presented themselves at the psychological moment. Clearly, as he himself could only act openly at rare intervals and under great difficulties, some one he could trust on the spot, and preferably in a subordinate position, became a necessary adjunct of his system — and a very useful one too, if his repeated assurances on the subject are as deserving of credit as those who know his letters have every reason to believe.

The Abbé's first report[1] was carried to the Petit Luxembourg by "un homme sûr, et à moi," and can have conveyed no balm of Gilead to two anxious minds. It is quite evident that, debarred as they were from taking the prompt line for which one especially, if not each, was so well fitted, they had been constrained to pull fairly hard at certain wires. The result of this manipulation they were now watching like skilful anglers, themselves unseen. Mercy's letter on the subject to Baron Neny reposes uncopied in the Archives at Vienna, but his

[1] With all deference to the erudite editors, who add in a footnote "cette lettre manque," I should say it is No. 5, p. 364, of the Collection published by Ritter v. Arneth (Leipzig, 1866).

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report to the Chancellor throws a little light on the situation :—

> Monsieur de la Vauguyon works openly to get rid of the Abbé, who is in his way. . . . Prince Starhemberg has conceived and proposed the measures that appear to him most suitable for defeating that project . . . and Monsieur de Choiseul, equally with the Bishop of Orléans, has adopted these methods . . . Yesterday I received the enclosed letter from the Abbé treating of this *tracasserie*.

On the 22nd of May, accordingly, the King received the Bishop of Orléans, who, as he told Vermond, spoke to his master "strongly and in great detail": the King listened attentively, approved several of his conclusions and seemed disposed to act on them, without, however, making any definite promises. This may have determined the Duc de Choiseul, who followed next day, to be even more explicit. Impulsive and unmeasured as usual in his language, he discoursed even more strongly on the vexed question (so far more important than any *tracasseries*) of the Dauphin, his behaviour and manners, and his lamentable education; "in short," added this, the most competent judge, "unless he changes he will end by becoming the horror of the nation"—an expression which "moved the King very deeply."

It was a thousand pities that some one had not succeeded in moving him before. Looking back, and especially with the after knowledge we now possess, it does not seem credible that the parents should have waited until a marriage, following on a two years' engagement, was an accomplished fact, before commencing the real education of a young couple destined to live their lives in such a vicious and idle environment as Versailles.

The celebration of mass was always at mid-day, and Marie-Antoinette attended it with the King, her bridegroom, and the old princesses; when,

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as was often the case, Louis XV. was absent from the palace with his boon companions of both sexes, the newly-married couple went alone to the chapel, after which followed a *tête-à-tête* dinner in public. They both "ate very fast," and this strange ceremony always terminated by half-past one.

On the Tuesday of the week following the wedding, Vermond was summoned immediately after dinner to the presence of his pupil, but he was not given much opportunity of delivering himself of his commissions. He was barely allowed a quarter of an hour, the Princess seeming afraid that the Dauphin might appear at any moment and find the Abbé there. She was coached on the matter of what to say to the King, the Dauphin and Monsieur de la Vauguyon, and showed "more embarrassment than timidity." The following morning her courage had returned. Vermond found her at her toilette, with a letter to the Empress beside her and very decided in desiring that it should be taken charge of by him, and despatched to Paris where the messenger would be waiting. "I do not know if my taking this letter will be approved of," added Vermond, whose duties were ill-defined and instructions scanty, "but I obeyed her orders, not wishing to add to her fears and embarrassment." She proposed to defer her speeches until she had seen Comte de Mercy, but the Abbé strongly deprecating delay, she promised to make these "to-morrow," and asked him to tell Comte de Mercy that she would "take courage and do well." "But," observed the Abbé, "under all her assurance I see moments of sadness, and I will not answer for the courage until I have proof of it." He did his best, poor man, to reassure her by telling her that the Bishop said the King considered his new granddaughter

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was both clever and prudent—by which he may have meant discreet—in which case she differed greatly from most of those at Versailles who were three times her age.

At this juncture the doors opened, and the only person who ever entered the Dauphine's rooms unannounced was ushered in. The Abbé retired to a little distance, while the boy and girl eyed one another curiously — he clumsy, *gauche*, and embarrassed, she graceful, charming, half smiling, half sad, and how much to be pitied! Louis-Auguste glanced uncertainly at the women of the bedchamber and dressers, waiting with downcast eyes, apparently without sight or hearing. "Did you sleep?" he asked. She answered by a monosyllable, "Yes," and he turned and went out of the room without another word, leaving the girl—alone as she was in a foreign country, far from her home, her mother, brothers and sisters, and the friends and pursuits of her short life—to amuse herself as best she could through the long May afternoon with a little dog for sole companion.

Vermond's report continues:—

I ought not to hide from Your Excellency that Madame de Noailles has been informed of the observations addressed to me by Monsieur de la Vauguyon. She seems outrageous, and declares she will send in her resignation to the King, if Monsieur de la Vauguyon is permitted to meddle with what goes on in the Dauphine's rooms ("chez Madame la Dauphine"). Madame de Noailles and the Bishop of Orléans assure me that "Mesdames" have received a favourable impression of me and are disposed in my favour. I do not know if this impression is in any way useful to me, but I shall not move a finger to strengthen it without Your Excellency's opinion. The Dauphine would be very glad to know when she will see you. Would you kindly let me know? You will easily believe, Sir, that it would have been a great consolation to me, at this moment, to go and see you and Monsieur the Prince de Starhemberg also: but this

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is the crisis, and I feel I shall do better to remain on the spot.

Place me, I beg, Sir, at the feet of your unique and incomparable Sovereign. I am not in a fit state to write to her: however careful I might be I could not entirely conceal my pain. Assure her, I beg you, that the certainty of her goodness gives me a courage of which I should never have supposed myself capable: in spite of all the affronts I shall hold on as long as it is possible and I feel I can be of use.

The Dauphine amuses herself with her little dog: I feared the drawbacks. Monsieur de Starhemberg thought it might be useful, which it is, as the distraction of a moment, but this is succeeded by deep thought. My heart is wrung by all this.

One would like to know what impression Vermond's cry for help produced on the two diplomatists. In default of Mercy's letter to Baron Neny there is his private report to Prince Kaunitz:—

Monseigneur: The copy (subjoined) of my letter to Monsieur de Neny contains the little I thought it my duty to tell him of the Dauphine's concerns. It would be impossible to be more interesting than this Princess by reason of the qualities she displays. But these very qualities constitute a striking indictment of those of her husband, who at the time of the wedding appeared to be on the point of some development, but who has now relapsed into the disagreeable state to which he is inclined by nature. Since their first interview he has not shown the slightest sign of predilection for the Dauphine, or anxiety to please her—in public or private. Fortunately, his indifference and incivility do not appear to intimidate the young Princess, and probably owing to some accidental circumstance her behaviour is such as an experience and address far beyond her age might prescribe. . . ."[1]

The writer added that a copy of Vermond's letter would also be found appended, and proceeded to discuss matters of business only.

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, May 26, 1770.

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Comte de Mercy knew Marie-Antoinette very well afterwards; at that time, he had only the slightest knowledge of her character and probably did not realise what a strong motive power wounded pride may be in a high-couraged nature. Vermond reported constant fits of depression, which indeed Comte de Mercy himself witnessed constantly enough later on.

The Chancellor's letter afforded no assistance on that particular point. He was highly indignant with the Duc de Choiseul for having allowed the Intendant des Menus Plaisirs to despatch to Vienna an actor "about as bad as he is ugly. *Mais à bon chat, bon rat*; I assure you I shall remember it when the time comes." Then, putting aside these vengeful thoughts, he asked for an account of Prince Starhemberg's proceedings in Paris. To this, after describing his own political attitude and its results, the ambassador replied:—

> He responded on his side in a straightforward and accommodating manner to my treatment of him: I do not believe he discussed any political matters with Monsieur de Choiseul, and he passed on to me daily the little that was said on those subjects. His sole attention was concentrated on what concerns Madame the Dauphine: he entered with ardour into the means for assuring to me an easy access to the Princess and immediately confided to me what he had stated on the subject at Court.

Prince Starhemberg left to take up his appointment at Brussels on the 7th June, and on the 8th the ambassador drove to Versailles. Arrived at the palace in the evening, he found the Royal Family the centre of an admiring crowd, and engaged in playing cavagnol. The bride was seated next to the King, and was not too deeply immersed in her rather tiresome game to espy a well-known face almost as soon as Mercy entered the door. She signed to him to approach, intimating that

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she wanted to speak to him. Rather unkindly, it must be confessed, he "supplicated her to finish her game": it was barely over before she got up, and seeing he held a paper guessed it was a letter from her mother, and seizing it ejaculated joyfully, "*Gott sei dank!*" It was almost the last German word she spoke for many a long day to come.

After she had read it she told him that Comtesse de Noailles had advised her to address the Comptroller-General direct about her own household—the unfortunate servants had had no payments whatever for six months—but before saying anything the Archduchess desired to ask the advice of the ambassador and the Duc de Choiseul. With a promptitude which shows how common an occurrence it was, she was informed that the late Queen and "Mesdames" had always adopted a similar course in case of need!

Supper being announced, nothing more could be said, but as they filed out Madame de Noailles managed to whisper that she had something particular to say. On Comte de Mercy proceeding to her apartments, she unfolded a disquieting tale, probably quite unconscious how little of it was news to her visitor; still less was she aware what heavy responsibilities rested on her own shoulders, or how inadequate she was to prove herself in the sequel. Poor Madame de Noailles was a round nail in a square hole. If public appearances and Royal progresses had alone depended on her, no one was better fitted for the position. Unluckily, a very great deal more was required. Looking back at the endless mistakes that were made from the first, it would be hard to specify the ultimate responsibility of certain actors in the drama. The days came to them all when human lives paid for a single blunder, and Comte de Mercy's twenty years of strenuous work and cease-

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less vigilance counted as a unit in the opposite scale.

Madame de Noailles now informed him that the "cabal" were working harder than ever, on the pretext that as Vermond was given no chance of carrying on his duties as "Reader," he was useless and out of place, and should be sent about his business. The King's evident *penchant* for the Dauphine was being counteracted by a tissue of falsehoods, such as that she had been heard to say that nothing would induce her to accompany the King on his private journeys. The worst thing of all was that they were working to introduce a confessor of their own choice—an intriguer in their interests—a person to be suspected on every ground; and to fill the important post of first woman of the bedchamber by a "creature" of Comtesse de Marsan (Comte de Mercy called everything and every one who opposed his Sovereign's interests "cabals" and "creatures"). In short, there was no manner of vexation and annoyance they were neglecting to bring to bear on Madame de Noailles herself, who would be unable for long to put up with such malevolent persecutions.

"I tried to calm her," writes the recipient of these not unexpected confidences; "I made her see that in effect we have to do with wicked people, but that these are neither sufficiently clever or powerful to alarm us." The silly spiteful old Duc de la Vauguyon was an adversary quite unworthy of such skill, but the Governess of the Children of France plays a large part in subsequent letters—Comte de Mercy never made the common mistake of under-rating an adversary's importance. He saw at once that the most effective countermove would be for Comtesse de Noailles to tell all this herself to the King, who next morning

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granted her an audience and showed himself for once to some advantage.

He replied succinctly that Vermond must remain with his Royal pupil; to whom, moreover, Monsieur de Mercy should have constant access, in the character of an intermediary between her and her own family. Madame de Noailles for once played her part as desired. She enlarged on the Dauphine's great wish to please the King, whose private journeys she was anxious to share. Louis XV. smiled without replying, and "treated Madame de Noailles very well," a phrase which fills one with wild surmises as to what would have happened had he knocked her on the head with the poker. He then, of his own accord, perhaps bethinking him of the diatribes of the Bishop and First Minister, enlarged on the repellent manner and the coldness of the Dauphin: "At present it is necessary to let him go his own way. . . . He is extremely timid and shy—in short, he is not like other men." If by this the estimable grandfather intended to make a dark allusion to himself, it was undoubtedly fortunate both for his wife and the kingdom in general that the heir-apparent was cast in a different mould. His Majesty brought the interview to a conclusion by granting an absolutely free hand to Madame de Noailles, upon whom he said he should depend for the execution of all that was advisable in connection with the Dauphine and her household. The lady of honour repeated this herself to Comte de Mercy, and yet had not the judgment, or the resolution, or the *savoir faire*—call it what you will—to appoint competent trustworthy assistants in each department to second her in carrying out what was obviously beyond the power of one individual to achieve.

That same day the Archduchess was alone after

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dinner with Madame de Noailles, when a page inquired whether Her Royal Highness would receive the Imperial ambassador. The latter, who was waiting the summons in the palace itself, appeared after a short interval, when the Comtesse retired into a corner out of earshot, and Marie-Antoinette listened attentively to the first of a long series of those invaluable homilies which only the earnest manner and consummate tact of the mentor rendered supportable.

We can picture the scene—outside the long windows, the terraces with their innumerable steps leading to Lenôtre's *chef-d'œuvre*, the huge gardens with their fountains and stone basins and statues; inside the gilded walls and splendid furniture; the stiff correct form of Madame de Noailles and the velvet coat and powdered head of the ambassador with his keen refined features; and in a high-backed, carved and gilt arm-chair the slender girlish figure with the fair patrician profile and the quantities of light hair barely touched with powder. We can almost hear the clear young voice, the fluent if slightly incorrect French, with the German accent growing more noticeable as the speaker pours forth an eager stream of questions, explanations, answers.

Comte de Mercy enlarged on his own "extreme mortification" at being obliged to inform the Empress of the Abbé's impending retirement; the latter had no opportunity of doing his work and therefore would acquire a *fausse* air of intrigue which had already been the subject of adverse comment, most unsuitable, etc., etc. The Archduchess showed signs of embarrassment: for no considerations would she consent to the departure of the Abbé, and if his staying depended on her reading she would begin that very afternoon—and she kept her word. She was then reminded of her promise to Prince

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Starhemberg to devote some hours daily to serious occupations, and in return informed the ambassador that she was quite satisfied with the Dauphin, whose frigid manner and shyness she put down to the sort of education he had had; that he seemed to possess a good character, and that she was positive he held to the Duc de la Vauguyon by habit and fear, and not by affection or esteem. She had never been able to extract from him what he really thought of those by whom he was surrounded. Comte de Mercy felt, on the other hand, that it was only too easy to see what his little Princess thought of people—especially of those she mistrusted—for he besought her not to call attention in public to her dislike of the Governor and his son the Duc de St. Mégrin—"both sufficiently maltreated by H.R.H. *La bonne politique* exacts dissimulation, and does not permit one to give oneself up to party feelings," and so on, *und so weiter*. Then Comte de Mercy suggested the name of a confessor already chosen (although, of course, he did not say so) by the Bishop of Orléans, Prince Starhemberg, and the Duc de Choiseul, the last by no means regarded (or his Duchess either) as numbered among the orthodox of the flock. This was the Abbé Moudoux, "an ecclesiastic of a recognised probity and piety." He was tall, slight, with the face of an ascetic, and an austere manner which rather alarmed Marie-Antoinette until she got over a first awed impression. He was both respected and liked, while Soldini, the Dauphin's spiritual pastor—deeply in the confidence of Marie-Josèphe de Saxe—was generally considered inferior in capacity and far less trustworthy. It is not surprising that Moudoux looked austere: he was the King's confessor and must have been the recipient of some remarkable confidences.

Then and in the future Marie-Antoinette was

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in the habit of discussing Louis-Auguste with the curious dispassionateness of one whose feelings are not involved. And Comte de Mercy rather naturally softened off in writing to the Empress the opinion he had expressed to Prince Kaunitz as to their Sovereign's new son-in-law, whose aunts had no false delicacy about asking leading questions, and indeed acquired a great deal of their information by suddenly hurling an inquiry at the head of some one too nonplussed by the suddenness of the attack to parry or evade what in calmer moments he would not have dreamt of answering with even a semblance of truth. Louis-Auguste was supposed to have informed Princess Adelaide that "he found his wife very amiable—that her expression and her mind suited him—that," in short, "he was very pleased with her." It was more than she was with him, poor little thing; but Comte de Mercy glossed over this delicate question in his confidential report: "There has been no intimacy to any extent—even in private—but in view of the extreme youth of this august couple, there is plenty of time," etc. Supposing some seer had foretold that neither was destined to reach the age of forty!

Comte de Mercy collected all the opinions he could gather to transmit to the Empress. The King told him he found the Dauphine "very lively, and rather childish, but that," he added kindly, "is only natural at her age." He himself had been a gloomy and morose child, without a vestige of healthy natural spirits, so perhaps he was not the best judge. The aunts, "Mesdames de France," expressed themselves as being enchanted with their new niece: the Court and public were loud in her praises; but, added the sagacious ambassador, "since it has pleased Your Majesty to command me to reveal my reflections I must obey with as much

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frankness as zeal and confess that, without permitting myself to be dazzled by the well-merited success of Madame the Dauphine, I consider that in the case of a lively and impressionable people it is easier to start successfully than it is to preserve such esteem in the long run." H.R.H. must be more careful about her demeanour in public, except in church, where her behaviour was all that could be desired; she sat negligently in her chair at her meals, and at the eternal cavagnol. Her *ajustements* sometimes appeared to be disarranged by the little games of the day. And worst of all, she had been observed (when was she not observed?) to permit herself to make remarks and jokes about those in whom she noticed anything specially funny. And even if the patient and kindly mentor had felt annoyed with her, the feeling could not have lasted long, for when he had occasion to speak she showed for the Empress "so much love, respect, and desire to please that if Y.M. thought fit to lay stress on these points in private letters, I am sure it would have a far more salutary effect than anything that could be said elsewhere." He was right in a sense, but the Empress overdid it. She was harsh and unjust, when an appeal to the feelings from such a source would probably have achieved what no amount of driving could ever do.

Antoine Paul Jacques de Quélen, Duc de la Vauguyon, a Breton nobleman with about a dozen other titles, was, notwithstanding all his high-sounding names, not so ancient in point of family as many less pretentious courtiers. His alliance with the far older St. Mégrins had completely turned his head—to use M. de Goncourt's picturesque expression, "son pauvre esprit s'était abîmé dans l'étiquette." He was hypocritical and false, using religion as a cloak to conceal his disordered morals. His jealousy knew no bounds, for it soon dawned

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even on his limited intelligence that the Dauphin's coldness and reserve were responding by degrees to the sunshine of a gentler influence than his joyless youth had hitherto known. Before very long he was bestowing on Marie-Antoinette an amount of confidence such as he had shown to no one since his mother died. The Duke's uneasy vanity took alarm—what in the world could the young couple have to talk about? His measures for solving this problem would not commend themselves to most people. The first letter from the Dauphine that Ritter v. Arneth was able to publish is dated July 9th. It is written in a perfectly unformed and, it must be confessed, a very bad hand, without punctuation and with every third word misspelt: Choisy is "Choissi," the Dauphin "mon Mary," and so on:—

Il est change de beaucoup. . . . J'etoit seule avec mon Mary lorsque Mon. de la Vauguyon apporche d'un pas precipite pour ecouter, un valet de Chambre qui est sot ou tres honnete homme ouvre la porte et Mon. le Duc se trouve planté comme un piqué sans pouvoir reculé lorsse je fit remarquer a mon Mary l'inconvenient qu'il y a de laisser ecouter au porte et il la tres bien prisse. Comme j'ai promisse a Votre Majesté de lui dire la moindre indisposition je lui dirai donc . . .

Would it be possible to imagine anything more childish?

Madame, my very dear mother, I have heard that the messenger starts the day after to-morrow, and as we leave to-morrow for Choisy I did not wish to wait for the letters that Mercy is to bring me this evening for fear of not having time to answer. . . . For my dear husband, he is changed and to his advantage. He shews much friendliness to me and he even begins to shew me some confidence. He certainly does not like Mon. de la Vauguyon, but he fears him. A singular history happened to him the other day. I was alone with my husband when Mon. de la Vauguyon approaches precipitately to listen at the door. A Groom-of-

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the-Chambers who is either a fool or a very honest man opens the door and Mon. le Duc finds himself planted there like a sentry unable to retreat. Then I pointed out to my husband the inconvenience of allowing listening at doors—and he took it very well.

. . . . . .

Your Majesty will permit me to send you a letter for Naples, in which I warn my sister to send her letters by Vienna.—I have the honour to be, with the most respectful tenderness, your most affectionate and dutiful daughter,

ANTOINETTE.

9th July.

It is to be hoped that the Dauphin took the lesson to heart, and discouraged as far as he could what appears from the above to have been a recognised practice. It certainly seems to have been deeply ingrained in the Duc de la Vauguyon, for, quite undeterred by his misadventure, only a very few days elapsed before he made another attempt to listen to conversation obviously not intended for him to hear.

In endeavouring to understand references to rooms, staircases, entrances, etc., in these old palaces, it is necessary to eliminate from one's mind all ideas of the construction of modern English houses, even the largest and most splendid. Rooms opening directly on to passages and staircases were practically unknown. Miles of corridors radiated from the great State stairs, but these passages—if one may so term them—were mainly composed of anterooms opening one into another, and it was rarely, indeed, that State rooms were found (even bed-chambers) which were approached otherwise than through an interminable succession of similar apartments, seen through a long vista of open gilded doors. In each principal anteroom belonging to the endless sets of "apartments" into which the huge palaces were divided and subdivided, a number of servants

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waited by day and slept at night, and visitors entering or emerging had to run the gauntlet not only of pages, grooms- and ushers-of-the-chamber, and other functionaries whose duties kept them on the spot, but also of any and every person whom pleasure or duty brought to Versailles and other Royal residencies in the hope (sometimes fruitless) of being received by a Prince of the Blood or a Minister of State. We may gather that the Dauphine's ante-chambers were very fairly crowded, and there is little doubt that the Abbé spent several hours daily hanging about on the chance of delivering some of the ambassador's messages, or executing some order of the Empress-Queen. Had it been necessary at all times of the day to clear a way through the crowd every time the Archduchess went in and out, or on each occasion that Madame de Noailles, without whose orders nothing could be done, was summoned, the inconvenience would have been even worse than it was. Consequently small private staircases and narrow corridors had been constructed in the thickness of the walls, and, stuffy and ill-lighted as many of these were, they were of the utmost use to those for whose benefit they had been contrived. The doors giving access to the actual rooms were generally small and as unobtrusive as they could be made; for example, some were so ingeniously concealed in the carved *boiseries* that it was only on pressing a hidden spring that the entire panel flew back. Others were entirely covered by tapestry, sometimes by a picture or a curtain; and as a rule the alcoves, in which stood the carved and gilded bedsteads in vogue in the eighteenth century, contained more than one means of exit, unthought of, behind their flowing drapery of rose or blue damask. The Dauphine's private passages were always called "la retirade" by Comte de Mercy,

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and were apparently often used by Madame de Noailles, whose only means of approaching the Archduchess's rooms from her own apartment at Compiègne, except by public ways, seems to have been along a terrace. The old princesses, apparently well acquainted with the methods that persons constituted like the Governor of the Children of France might attempt to employ, kept their inner corridors and doors carefully locked, providing those whom they specially favoured with pass-keys.

Comtesse de Noailles was proceeding in her usual stately manner along the private passages to the Dauphine's room one morning, when, to her amazement, she came plump upon the Duc de la Vauguyon, evidently bent on a similar errand. All communications for interviews or audiences passed through the hands of the lady of honour, who was therefore aware that the Duke had not been sent for. There was no love lost between them. She at once, and very rightly, told him he could go no farther. He immediately declared that he should; whereupon an unseemly wrangle ensued, in the course of which both said "the hardest things to one another and placed no restrictions on their mutual hatred." All of this had the effect of inciting the Dauphine to fresh outbursts of indignation against the Governor and his son, both of whom she continued to treat with great coldness, when she was not engaged in the even more dangerous pastime of laughing at both in such a manner that they could not fail to perceive that they were being turned into ridicule.

In about six months' time she had entirely alienated Louis-Auguste from his once dreaded tutor and his party, the "dévots," including that undesirable member, Madame de Marsan—for all of which, as we may be sure, they bore her the utmost

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ill-will, even if they were unconscious that in the course of a long discussion Marie-Antoinette gaily assured the Dauphin, with that striking absence of elementary charity so rarely seen after extreme youth is past, that "the Governor and his son were a couple of *fripons*, of whom one could not be too careful." She herself never understood the meaning of caution, and was, moreover, suffering from the particular form of indiscretion that attacks those very open and unreserved people who find themselves in new and unfamiliar surroundings without any one to whom they can with impunity express their opinions and air their views. If one comes to think of it, who was there for the forlorn Archduchess to speak to?

The King, who was bored to death with everything and everybody, excepting perhaps his extraordinary favourite, had begun to relapse into mysterious attacks of coma, giving rise in more than one European capital to a persistent rumour that he had taken to drink. He was still good-looking; his fine black eyes, and the imposing air he could assume when it suited him, had a great effect on those who esteemed him least. He had no intention of, and less inclination for, acquitting himself of any part of his duty to his orphan grand-children—a duty which, in the case of his own son and his numerous daughters, he had never attempted to carry out. Fundamentally insincere, less inherently kindly than might have been expected from the fatherly manner it pleased him at times to assume, he had a marked disinclination for speaking out on any subject in his own family; he preferred writing, even to his nearest relations living under one of the many roofs that covered the endless buildings known as the Palace of Versailles, those harsh and bitter things which he had all the desire with none of the courage

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to say. No one could ever discover his real opinion; he was probably incapable of forming any, or if he did, of remaining in the same mind for two days together. In business he was sharp enough when sufficiently roused to fix his attention; he could make apposite, not to say pungent, remarks, and he was by no means wanting in a kind of mordant shrewdness.

The large number of French historians and the entire company of English authors who have touched on this period of history, are mainly agreed on two essential points that have necessarily coloured their narratives. One is Marie-Antoinette's supposed amazing popularity in France—the other Louis XV.'s extreme fondness for his new granddaughter-in-law. I am a trifle sceptical on either count, for both are opposed to subsequent events; and while admitting the main facts it is difficult to agree that these feelings existed to the unlimited extent that has been alleged. This is not the place to discuss at any length the decadent being who represented in his own handsome person the ruin of a kingdom and a race. It is more than doubtful whether he was capable of comprehending the character of the young girl who was so unlike his own daughters at her age. Doubtless his Bourbon pride was gratified by the little Archduchess's rank; he probably considered her extreme youth likely to prove an advantage, and had no suspicion of the dangers it entailed in the matter of transforming her into a Frenchwoman. One and all honestly started from the premise that no girl could be pretty, or charming, or possess good manners and accomplishments, unless she were French. In the present case, the King was, without realising it in the least, working on a strata of hereditary qualities transmitted through her semi-French father. He could and did

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make approving speeches about Marie-Antoinette, especially when such were likely to be passed on to his valuable ally—the Empress. But what was the real value of such marks of approbation? Had she been half a dozen years older she might have acquired an influence over him, always granting that she had a free hand. But by the time she came to France the King was already under the spell of an obsession which no efforts of a young and pure-minded girl were calculated to affect one way or the other. The Archduchess Elisabeth married to Louis XV. might have been the means of weaning him from his vile habits and of drawing him insensibly towards the long-forgotten joys of a tranquil and virtuous domestic life. But below the surface the Dauphine was a sealed book to him, as he mercifully was to her. There could be no real sympathy between the unformed, backward, impulsive girl and a *blasé* and prematurely aged *roué*, who by the time she arrived in France was already hovering on the precarious borderland of senile decay. He had had no experience of foreign countries, having rarely been outside his own dominions: how could he guess at the gulf fixed between the life of a Hapsburg in Vienna and a member of his own family? Perhaps, in a face that betrayed every passing impression, he read the fact that he himself inspired Marie-Antoinette with more surprise and awe than affection or esteem. There was so much about him that she could not understand, haunted as he was by that odd-looking Madame du Barry, whose Court functions the sharp eyes of fourteen were quite unable to determine, and the prototype of whom the Archduchess was positive she had never seen at Vienna.

With the Princes and Princesses of the Blood Royal she was not brought much in contact. The first after the Dauphin's brothers and sisters were

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the Duc d'Orléans (whose morganatic marriage soon after alienated him from the King) and the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres, who lived in Paris, at the Palais-Royal. That Princess, good, amiable and a worthy daughter of an admirable father, the Duc de Penthièvre, would have seemed a likely friend for Marie-Antoinette, from whom, however, she was separated by causes to be considered later on. The second Prince of the Blood was Prince de Condé, whose son, the Duc de Bourbon, was married unhappily to his cousin Princess Bathilde d'Orléans. Then followed Prince de Conti, the centre of the intellectual society at the Temple presided over by one of the cleverest women in France, Madame de Boufflers, the "Idole" of Madame du Deffand's letters. The Prince's son and daughter-in-law, a Princess of Modena, also related to every one, presented an object-lesson in ill-assorted unions, and the pair were eventually separated, the Princess petitioning to be granted the pension of *a widow* of a member of the King's family! Etiquette hedged all these round and kept them at a distance. It is quite evident too, that, unknown to Comte de Mercy, most undesirable stories were told to the Dauphine by her suite about the Prince de Condé and others, moving her to treat them in public with regrettable stiffness. The excellent Duc de Penthièvre made few appearances at Court; his life was entirely given up to good works and to fulfilling the vast responsibilities entailed by the management of six or eight huge properties and the claims made on the richest man in the kingdom. His dear cousin the King was not in sympathy with a Prince of his House who took so serious a view of life, and whose conduct was an object-lesson and perhaps indirectly a reproach to all who used a great position for the unbridled gratification of base and ignoble tastes. When in Paris the Duke resided

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at the splendid Hôtel de Toulouse,[1] and of all his country places preferred Rambouillet, where, as elsewhere, his constant companion was his daughter-in-law.

The Dauphine's brothers- and sisters-in-law would have been some comfort to her had their respective suites been less quarrelsome and jealous. As it was, what the Empress called "tracasseries" were endless. Madame de Noailles disapproved of Madame de Marsan, whose conduct in her youth had not been as blameless as might be imagined considering the parade she and the Duc de la Vauguyon made of religion. As is not uncommonly the case when people assume a very critical attitude towards others, the principles both professed and the practice they exhibited were two widely different things.

The Duc de St. Mégrin, the Governor's son, was an object-lesson in his father's system of education, and was generally considered one of the worst *mauvais sujets* in Paris. Why the Governor was tolerated by the high-principled late Dauphin, whose tutor he had been, and by the grave and sensible Marie-Josèphe de Saxe, it is impossible to say. One would suppose that such glaring faults as his must have struck any one who had at heart the welfare of these children—left as they were with no support but such a grandfather as Louis XV., and with such incompetent and useless members of society as Madame Adelaide and Madame Sophie to fill the place of their own mother and the excellent and accomplished old Queen.

The two under- or sub-governesses, Baronne de Mackau and Vicomtesse d'Aumale, appear to have been kindly disposed, but were entirely under Madame de Marsan's control. Princess Clothilde

[1] What remains of the Hôtel de Toulouse is now the Banque de France.

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at twelve years of age was good-tempered and placid, but not particularly interesting, and at this stage of her life Princess Elisabeth exhibited few premonitory symptoms of the saintly character that distinguished her in later life. She was very shy and wild, very different in character from her second brother, who, precisely the same age as Marie-Antoinette, exhibited a good deal of caution and an amount of *savoir faire* rarely met with at his age. He was proud of his intellectual attainments, especially of his progress in foreign languages, living and dead, and of his prodigious memory, which he delighted to exhibit and to air his capacity for classical quotations. The Comte d'Artois, two years younger, was lively and almost abnormally sharp, but was hedged round with tutors and governors, and was generally engaged in devising some novel means of tormenting the unfortunate persons who were responsible to the King for his welfare. One of the sub-governors, Chevalier de Ferrières, related a characteristic anecdote to Dr. Tronchin, which that excellent man wrote off then and there to his daughter.[1]

The Dauphin, said his tutor, could not endure gamblers, and was in the habit of making diatribes to the little Comte d'Artois, then about twelve years old, who had "a passion for games of chance."

"You will ruin yourself," was the Dauphin's parting shot.

"Papa-Roi will pay my debts."

"When Papa-Roi is dead I shan't pay them, you can be sure of that. It is equally disgraceful to ruin oneself, or to win from one's inferiors."

An equally good story came at the same time from the same source. During a lesson in the

[1] *Un Médecin d'autrefois.*

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riding school, the Dauphin's performance was such that the equerry, becoming annoyed, said:

"Monseigneur, you make the same mistake over and over again. Don't you know that a prince who is destined to become a great king should know how to ride?"

"No, Sir," replied the Dauphin, replacing his hat firmly on his head, "I was not aware of it. I only know that a great king should be just and make his people happy."

Has any one's appearance been more frequently discussed or described than that of Marie-Antoinette? After closely studying all the best authorities on the subject I have come to the conclusion that the following description is the best, for as it is certainly the case that some people have no power of describing others, it is necessary to ascertain the value of a description before accepting it as truth. The editor of a noted series of historical memoirs gives the following sketch by an unnamed contemporary, whose exactness is vouched for by Monsieur Barrière himself:—

> Her figure was small but perfectly proportioned. Her arms were well-formed and of a dazzling whiteness: her hands elongated, with tapering fingers and pink transparent nails: her foot charming. It is thus we beheld her at fifteen (*sic*) at the moment of her marriage. When she had grown and filled out, her foot remained equally charming, but her figure altered slightly and became too full. Her face was a rather long oval, her eyes blue, soft yet animated: neck slender and perfectly set on, possibly rather long, but well placed on her shoulders; forehead protruding ("trop bombé") and insufficiently covered by her hair.[1]

This description, curiously written and difficult to translate, is borne out by Madame le Brun and by one or two acknowledged likenesses. The allusion to her figure becoming *dérangée* is easily

[1] *Journal des Débats*, August 26, 1858, Monsieur F. S Barrière.

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explained. She had one shoulder, the right, more projecting than the other. So incompetent were her suite to discharge their duties, that it needed the intervention of the Imperial ambassador, assisted by the First Minister, to induce her whom every one agreed was a very docile and amiable little Princess to wear a *corps de baleines*. In spite of this, however, the defect increased rather than diminished, for twenty years later—in the shameful scenes that accompanied the sacking of the Tuileries by a frenzied and unchecked mob,[1] when the wearing apparel of a Queen of France was tossed about and tried on by the scum of the slums—it was seen that her bodices were padded in that one shoulder.

No defects, however, militated in the smallest degree against the grace of one destined to become celebrated as the finest "mover" in Europe—if such an expression is permissible. Those who knew her best complained that none of her portraits—notably the early ones, done before her own excellent taste in dress had had time to assert itself—did her justice, which proves, I think, that her looks depended chiefly on expression and colouring. The pink and white of her excessively fair skin demanded shade; one may therefore conjecture that she looked her best in a hat. When her colour was slightly heightened people thought she was rouged, which was often not the case, although the application of that adornment (?) formed part of her state toilette in public. Her eyes protruded slightly, a characteristic called in France *à fleur de tête*; they were not quite blue and had a considerable admixture of grey. Their expression modified that of the lower part of her face, which in repose lapsed into severity as time went on. The entire countenance had the aquiline trend that accom-

[1] *Paris révolutionnaire*, by Monsieur G. Lenôtre.

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panies a distinct type, of which a markedly convex forehead and a high-bridged nose form component parts. Her mouth was very small, full, and charming in expression, with the true Hapsburg protrusion of the lower lip. The chief fault of the entire countenance was its want of breadth as opposed to its length, a fault increased in appearance by the manner in which her abundant fair hair was dragged back, drawn upwards at the sides by the inartistic Larsenneur, and plaited in a *queue* on the nape of her long neck. The fashions of to-day would have obviated these defects and made the most instead of the very least of her many claims to beauty.

People describe personal appearance so differently that it is hard to determine her height, and in those days the average was certainly below what it is now. It is reasonable to suppose that when —about five years after her marriage—she had done growing, she was well over middle size. Her manner of holding herself may have made her appear taller than she actually was, but she must have been considerably above the average in order to impress the most hostile observers as she did to the last, and without any advantage of dress or surroundings, with her remarkably imposing appearance.

It is less easy to imagine the Dauphin. That he was stout and ungainly we know, but he also grew very rapidly after his marriage and was a good height, which was fortunate, as he became exceedingly stout later on. His features, though fairly good, were heavy, and his complexion very bad, inclining to skin eruptions. His eyes, spoilt by his short sight, were a yellowish grey, and his rather coarse brown hair he wore powdered and gathered into two large *rouleaux* over his ears, so that it had all the appearance of a wig. In

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talking he mumbled in an uncontrollable voice on two registers, alternating between an unmusical falsetto and a rough base. He detested music as much as his bride loved it, and one of his pages has recorded that "no one sang so out of tune as the poor King," which must have been trying, as he habitually made a great deal of noise. Mademoiselle de Tourzel, whose room was over the Queen's boudoir at Versailles, could hear him (and no one else) quite plainly through the floor. Later on he trained himself to speak, or rather to read, his speeches effectively in public, and like a good many shy, *gauche* people who do themselves incalculable injustice, he had a disconcerting way of addressing a well-chosen apposite remark to the very individual who was harbouring dark doubts of the state of his brain. His loud discordant laugh became more and more frequent, and when repeated in resonant and untimely gusts produced a painful impression on those who cared for him, and frightened strangers half out of their wits. He had an inconvenient habit, probably due to deficient eyesight, of coming so close to those to whom he was talking that he ended by standing almost on their toes, obliging the deeply-embarrassed listener to back respectfully into the nearest wall. His modesty was remarkable, and was very bad for his younger brothers, who were already filled with a sense of their superiority over the elder, whose excellent qualities, far down below the unpleasing surface, were probably worth both their own characters put together. When they were small boys they received in audience a deputation from the provinces. The eldest listened in silence to a dissertation on his own astounding intelligence and precocity, giving rise to, etc., etc. As the harangue became more and more fulsome, its auditor became increasingly

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THE DAUPHIN.

From a picture signed H.F. in the *Jones Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.*

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uneasy, until he broke suddenly in on the astonished spokesman, in tones hoarse and husky from nervousness: "You are mistaken, Sir, it is not I who am clever—it is my brother de Provence."

The mismanagement and neglect of his Governor had been so notorious that widely-read satires were published in 1790 about the Dauphin's education. These writings were attributed with such persistency to the Choiseul family that all responsibility in the matter was publicly disclaimed by the widowed Duchess and her nephew, Gabriel.

This diffidence and mistrust of himself and his opinions, the very modesty and inclination to self-effacement that were among the most salient points in Louis-Auguste's character, were far, indeed, from being counteracted by any common-sense bracing on the part of those who were responsible for his bringing-up. Entertaining the meanest opinion of his own capacity and oppressed by his defective education, he fancied he saw in every indication of neglect, every sign that he was again under-rated, a fresh proof of his own unfitness for action. Hence the lamentable irresolution, the deference to any and every opinion good or otherwise, the dependence on the views of the last comer, which were destined to work such untold misery; which brought about his own destruction and, what was to him far more bitter, the deaths of three people for whose welfare he was responsible and who were dearer to him than life itself. For, in spite of the disadvantages of his youth, the Dauphin grew up to be a brave and a righteous man.

It was not wonderful that the Empress felt anxious about the child who had been despatched to and left alone in that vast maelstrom, the French Court. After relegating her, as we shall see, to the almost exclusive care of an ambassador and an

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abbé, Maria Theresa began to cast about for some suitable feminine guide, philosopher and friend on the spot; and, restricting herself perforce to the narrow limits of the French Royal Family, made, probably in default of a wider range, a most unfortunate selection. "These princesses," she wrote, alluding to "Mesdames" (the hope was father to the thought), "are full of virtues and talents." But Comte de Mercy had no opinion of the King's daughters. Perhaps he had perceived, in the course of the negotiations about the King and the Archduchess Elisabeth, how hopelessly silly and unreliable the princesses were. Madame de Durfort's information can have left him little illusion on that score, coupled with what he saw and heard elsewhere. Watching Marie-Antoinette closely as he did, he noticed a change in her manner ere two months had elapsed, and this he attributed to the example of "Mesdames de France," with whom "H.R.H. is now on terms of intimacy that have their advantages, but also certain drawbacks on the score of want of circumspection in speaking, and also on the score of the minor intrigues in which Mesdames persist in interfering, and in which it would be dangerous for the Dauphine to find herself entangled."

Henceforth his letters are full of warnings to the Empress on the subject of the princesses, and it is evident from the tenor of Maria Theresa's replies that she had the greatest difficulty in imagining what they were like. Even when the Empress was told in so many words that their conversation might be described as "indiscreet, to put it mildly, sometimes even too gay (*i.e.* improper)," she could not realise how dangerous they were. A good many of their failings were known to the King, who hailed with undisguised relief an acquisition to his family who, as he hoped,

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would remove some of the embarrassment caused by their clumsily rigid attitude towards his favourite. Marie-Antoinette's liveliness, her grace and charm, impressed him very favourably at first. "J'ai ma Duchesse de Bourgogne," he used to remark, in the semi-publicity of what he regarded as his private life. This was a graceful allusion to the affection aroused by his own charming young mother in Louis XIV., who proved himself a powerful mainstay to his Italian granddaughter in all her thousand indiscretions, to call her hazardous exploits by no harsher name. But if it pleased Louis XV. to liken himself to his great-grandfather, Marie-Antoinette, who had no half-rigid, half-indulgent old Madame de Maintenon at hand to palliate and condone her follies, was far removed indeed from having a Louis XIV. to depend upon for support or approval. "Le Roi Soleil" may have sunk his kingdom in a life-annuity, but at least he knew how to keep a Court in order, a feat which his successor was incapable of attempting to perform. Whatever vagaries, whether of speech or action, it might please the members of Louis XIV.'s family to indulge in, evil speakers and scandal-mongers disseminating libellous reports in close proximity to the throne soon realised that they had to reckon with an intelligent, wideawake ruler, intimately acquainted with the elements with which he had to deal. Louis XIV. allowed no foolish little foreign princess, torn *nolens volens* from her own country and her natural protectors, her head swimming with treacherous flattery and hollow adulation, to face alone a thousand prying eyes and a chorus of malicious tongues. Corrupted by the splendour and license around her, Adelaide of Savoie, the pretty and frivolous great-granddaughter of Charles the First, showed an inclination to wander by night in the gardens of Versailles or to drift

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about the lake in a Venetian gondola in the moonlight. Then to the warbling of nightingales in thickets and the splashing of fountains in marble basins succeeded a chorus of scandalized comment and hushed murmurs. Before these had time to spread or to take any hold of the over-vivid imaginations of the gossips and hangers-on of the Court, the King took prompt and effectual measures to silence criticism, the perils of which no one was in a better position than he to estimate at their true value. But towards the end of the eighteenth century a very different troop of actors trod the boards of the great gilded stage.

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CHAPTER VII

COMTE DE MERCY

Now that modern methods have superseded the inter-State communications in vogue a hundred and thirty years ago, it is not so easy to picture the conditions with which our ancestors had to deal.

The bearers of Lord Stormont's despatches shared the road to Calais principally with their own countrymen. The popular and witty Marchese Caracciolo, joyfully exchanging the fogs and dulness of heretic England for the manifold attractions of Paris, sent his emissaries to Naples in perilous proximity to those of Comte Viry and Marchese Spinola, representing respectively the King of Sardinia and the Republic of Genoa. Similarly the messengers of Comte Fuentes and Marchese de Souza-Couthino journeyed southward together on the road to the Pyrenees.

Many waters have flowed under the antique bridges crossing the Seine since hideous railways replaced the equipment of the messengers who left the various Embassies of Paris to diverge throughout Europe in their light-weight chaises along the old posting roads, dependent on the relays of horses always liable to be impounded just before the arrival of the unfortunate messenger by some Prince of the Blood, or audacious traveller with his pockets full of gold. The appurtenances of modern life may be very convenient—they are certainly extraordinarily ugly.

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Comte de Mercy certainly spared no pains to checkmate those whose anxiety to take copies of his private despatches was unquestionable. We know what a close and undeviating watch the various members of the Corps Diplomatique kept on one another's proceedings, and he had not only to reckon with the members of it previously enumerated, but also to defeat the schemes of the Cabinet of Versailles, whose employés were able to boast that no cipher that ever was invented was too intricate to defy their researches. To such a skilful angler as the Austrian ambassador all was fish that entered his net.

If Vermond was, as I imagine him, a great talker, broad, common-looking, with a large red face, a certain part of their exasperation at the retention by Comte de Mercy of so strange a coadjutor would be explained. Prince Auguste d'Arenberg (Comte de la Marck), who knew what he was talking about, says that Marie-Antoinette entertained a very poor opinion of Vermond's brains, and only attended to him when he presented himself as the accredited mouthpiece of Mercy, *the* medium, as the wideawake little Dauphine can have hardly failed to suspect, of so many of her mother's orders and strictures. Prince Auguste added that the Abbé was "passionately attached to the Dauphine, of whom he talked without ceasing"—a practice which, as we can well imagine, probably had its drawbacks from more than one point of view.

A less lenient guest at the Petit Luxembourg, where the Austrian Embassy was then installed, inquired on one occasion of the host:

"How *can* you tolerate that chattering bore?"

"How can you ask a question," was the quiet reply, "that you yourself can easily answer? It is because I want him."

In this answer lies the germ of the principle on

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FLORIMOND CLAUDE, COMTE DE MERCY-ARGENTEAU,
Imperial Ambassador to the Court and Cabinet of Versailles, 1766–1791.
Musée de Liège.

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which the existence and the daily occupations, year in and year out, of that remarkable personage were exclusively based. He never married, and his life was spent in an atmosphere of diplomacy and of Courts. His is one of the few pictures I have ever seen that carries out my preconceived ideas of the original. His slight figure suggests middle height; his plain velvet coat crossed by the ribbon of the Golden Fleece—"never, according to my ideas," wrote the Chancellor when his friend and pupil received the distinction at the moment of Marie-Antoinette's wedding, "never was an Order better bestowed." His powdered hair is turned back off a sensitive refined face, a face which one could not pass in a crowd without turning to look at it again, for it indicates great ability with a certain sympathetic kindliness underlying its reserve. Judging by the expression, its owner must have been guided by very different rules of conduct from those in vogue among his compeers and surroundings. Acute and highly strung as he looks, there is not the faintest indication of the levity he was always deploring among those who were supposed to be conducting State affairs in France; such eyes as his could have belonged only to a character at once well-balanced and true.

Florimond Claude de Mercy-Argenteau belonged by birth to the country that once formed part of Mary of Burgundy's vast inheritance. He was what used to be called a Fleming, and as such he gave his allegiance and undeviating loyalty to its rulers in general, and in particular to the great Empress under whose firm and benign sway the Netherlands enjoyed the blessings of prosperity at home and of peace abroad. Nearly related to families representing the foremost names of the Low Countries, such as Ligne, Crōy, Merode and others, Comte de Mercy, who early lost his mother

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(Baronne Thérèse Henriette de Rouvroy), was the only child of a father from whom he was generally separated, in spite of their attachment to one another. Comte d'Argenteau had added to his ancestral acres, to the old stronghold of his family near Liège and to the not far-distant Château of Fologne (now both alienated from the family) as well as to his estates in Hungary, d'Hogyesz, where he died in 1767, the properties, names and arms of the extinct Lorrainer Comtes de Mercy, whose distant relation he was and whose heir he eventually became. Thus his only son, starting young on a diplomatic career, found himself under the curious necessity of applying every three years to Duc de Choiseul for a *brevet de permission* to serve out of France. He was not, as is often stated, "a naturalized Frenchman": after the definite reunion to France of those political shuttlecocks between that kingdom and Germany — the Duchies of Lorraine and Bar — nobles of whatever nationality owning land in either were considered, according to French law, to come in a sense under the category of subjects of the Most Christian King.

Comte de Mercy's education seems to have been as varied as his after-life was destined to prove. He spent some years in the then celebrated academy at Turin, which numbered many foreigners, some English,[1] among its pupils. Serving as a volunteer under his father, who attained to high military rank, he left the Low Countries in 1748, on the proclamation of peace. Three years later found the young Count in Paris, attached to the Embassy of Count, afterwards Prince, Kaunitz, having as companions a Comte Seckendorf and Prince Starhemberg. It is inferred from letters that Prince Kaunitz was accompanied by his young protégé on his return to

[1] *Mémoires d'un voyageur qui se repose*, by Louis Dutens (Paris, 1806).

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Vienna in 1758: by that time Kaunitz had considerably modified the opinion he had written the previous year to Baron Koch, a secretary to the Empress. That letter contained some singularly inapposite prophecies:—

I am very satisfied with the conduct of Comtes Wallenstein and Mercy. . . . The latter joins to excellent morals a prudent and mild character: in spite of which I hardly dared flatter myself at the outset that it would be possible to employ him, because he was so shy, taciturn and *gauche* in his manners as to appear sullen: since he came here I have said and done so much that I begin to perceive with great pleasure the effects of my advice. He has assumed a very correct demeanour, frequents only the best company, and is endearing himself to all who know him. . . . I threatened—always in a kindly manner—never to employ him unless he cured himself of his faults. Since I see a change I begin to use him in my secretariat. He is not good at German: but as he has a great desire to learn he will improve. He will never be a brilliant genius, but the excellence of his character, his zeal and power of application, will take the place of his other deficiencies.

This reads strangely of the man who was destined to develop into one of the first three diplomatists of his day; the "vieux renard" of Madame Elisabeth; whom Maria Theresa called her friend, to whom she wrote with her own hand, signing her letters "your very affectionate," and to whom at the end of 1773 she offered the Chancellorship in succession to Kaunitz himself.

Meanwhile, in the period of inaction in Austria, the union between the pupil and mentor was strengthened by long visits to Austerlitz and by similar participation in the domestic life of the Kaunitz family when they all removed to Vienna. Count de Mercy had been appointed one of the Imperial Chamberlains, and soon after, his nomination as Minister Plenipotentiary from the Empress-Queen to the King of Sardinia at Turin was signed

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on 18th March, 1754. "A young man of twenty-five, who is said to be very clever," wrote Monsieur de Chauvelin, representing France, to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Paris. An amusing dispute soon arising between the two, in which the Imperial Minister gave abundant proof of his even temper and self-control, has nothing to do with this history.

Monsieur de Chauvelin's demise in November, 1778, was tragic. He was watching a card-game in the King's private apartments at Versailles, leaning on the back of Madame de Mirepoix's chair, when he was seized by a sudden contortion. "Monsieur de Chauvelin," exclaimed Madame du Barry in her vulgar voice, "what a face you are making!" He fell down apparently senseless, and on being carried out was found to have expired. The King, inquiring the cause of a disturbance in proximity to his own sacred person, was informed with due circumlocution and precaution of the sudden end of one who had been prominent among his boyish companions. He listened without comment and it was thought he had not understood. A few days later a poor horse among a team drawing his huge coach fell to rise no more. "*Tiens*," exclaimed the King, agreeably surprised at the coincidence, "just like poor Chauvelin." Perhaps the anti-Royalist tendencies of the son, who was requested by the Cabinet of St. James's to leave England within ten days, might have claimed a shade of justification.

Meanwhile Comte de Mercy prospered, and surmounted some of the shyness that never wholly left him. The authorities in Vienna were not slow to recognise the talents of a tyro who demonstrated that his discretion was only equalled by the distinction of his manners, and his knowledge of human nature by his ability in unravelling the most intricate affairs of State. Turin to

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Petersburg, Russia to Warsaw, constituted a series of unbroken successes, and at forty-four he was transferred to Paris, where he presented the curious anomaly of an ambassador holding an unlimited *brevet de permission* obtained some years before from the very Power to which he now found himself accredited by his own Sovereign. He joined his new post with the reputation that a close affinity existed between his methods and the *personnel* of his Embassy, and those of his old friend, now Chancellor of the Empire. Comte du Châtelet at Vienna, writing to the head of the Foreign Affairs in Paris, speaking *en vrai Parisien*, adopts a tone somewhat similar to that generally reserved for the Fathers of the Church in their sermons on Paradise :—

> Of all the Empress's subjects I am sure you will agree with me that he is the one best suited to the agreeable mission for which he is destined. It has long been the sole object of his wishes: and we should feel indebted to him for the trouble he has taken to obtain it. It is impossible to possess better principles. . . . He is an honest and enlightened man, who joins to much frankness a mild temper, and the purest intentions for the maintenance of the system, and we should hail the Empress's choice all the more that, etc., etc.[1]

This was not by any means a solitary testimony to his worth. Years before, at Petersburg, where he was an eye-witness of the Revolution that placed Catherine II. on the throne of the Czars, and when he was sending home to his own Government reports of such excellence that they have been published by the Russian Historical Society, the young diplomatist had attracted the attention of the agents of Louis XV.'s subterranean diplomacy. "Be careful of him," wrote the King

[1] *Correspondance secrète*, publiée par Monsieur Jules Flammermont, p. xx. *Archives des affaires étrangères de France*, série Vienne, vol. 304, fol. 238.

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to Baron de Breteuil, "all the more that he is said to be very able and well-informed."[1]

His information was the business of Kaunitz, and never surely was a Minister more adequately represented in a foreign capital. Comte de Mercy obviously attributed his present post, as he had done his past training, to the Chancellor: no pressure of work or business interrupted a correspondence, which on the one side was conducted in the affectionate good-humoured style of an elderly relative to an adopted son or nephew, while the ceremonious, stilted phraseology of the other conveys on every page the esteem and respect of the writer for one whose word he accepted without question and whose lightest behest it was his privilege to obey. He was destined to spend but a few months short of a quarter of a century in France: of this period four years had elapsed at the date of Marie-Antoinette's arrival and the commencement of a triangular correspondence, which terminated only with the death of the Empress ten years later. It is not easy to realise that until so late as 1874 the most valuable portion of this correspondence was inaccessible to the ordinary student, and that until then what now forms the mainstay of those who try to infuse some life and motion into the dry bones of history was a practically unknown quantity.

Maria Theresa was a prodigious worker: in addition to the labour of an Empire she kept in personal touch with a number of people at a distance; with her ten children, and occasionally with her daughters' husbands; with crowned heads and Ministers of State, and her faithful servants in many lands. She never seems to have been too busy or overdone to write; any one with claims on the House of Lorraine could rely on her support

[1] *Le Secret du Roi*, by Duc de Broglie (Paris, 1879).

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and interest; Princess Charlotte constantly heard from her; Prince Charles of Lorraine referred all questions to her in his dual capacity as her trusted Viceroy in the Austrian Netherlands and a brother-in-law of whom she was exceedingly fond. Had she been a private individual her industry would have been amazing enough, but her feats are almost incredible when one considers that most of her letters—certainly the most interesting from the point of view of her private affairs—were got through in addition to the ostensible business of her life. All night and well into the small hours of the morning she spent writing or dictating pages and pages that can never lose interest or charm.

It was probably easier to satisfy her than to fulfil all the requirements of the Chancellor, whose instructions at once complicate and explain certain intricacies of this correspondence:—

Nov., 1768.—I have received, mon cher Comte, your letter in your own handwriting by the messenger Kleiner, and on all points I have perceived with the utmost satisfaction proofs of the good head and the true heart that I have always recognized in you, and that long ago ensured to you my devoted friendship. You desire assurances of my approbation, and it is wholly yours. I know you well enough to feel positive that I can rely on your prudence. . . . You will recognize me, I hope, in the advice contained in my German postscript. . . .

The gist of this postscript[1] was as follows:—

The Chancellor was well aware that the Empress was in the habit—solely for her own pleasure and not from any

[1] I regret that I have not had the opportunity of translating this postscript direct from the German, but have had to use a French *résumé*. This is contrary to the practice followed in this work, for every letter has been carefully rendered (often greatly to the detriment of the English language) almost literally from the original, and almost, whenever possible, quoting the actual words or expressions used by the writer. The postscript was published *in extenso* in Ritter v. Arneth's *Histoire de Marie-Thérèse*, vol. vii., p. 563, note 616.

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feeling of mistrust—of carrying on a secret correspondence through one or another of her private secretaries with her Ambassadors abroad. Prince Kaunitz considered this could not be attended by the slightest inconvenience, and he thought it was "an innocent pleasure," in which his august mistress might well indulge herself. He desired Comte de Mercy to take advantage of the projected marriage of the Archduchess Marie-Antoinette with the Dauphin to embark on a correspondence of this nature with Baron Neny; he (Prince Kaunitz) even considered this necessary; and he only asked Comte de Mercy to send him a short précis of his secret reports to the Empress.

At the end Prince Kaunitz requests Comte de Mercy to carry out some small commissions (in regard to the Dauphine's trousseau and her future confessor; the sequence is not mine), the details of which Maria Theresa had sent to the Prince in her own hand. He added, "I am very glad you have undertaken these commissions—because that will be another little object for writing—and these small matters are often of more value than large ones."

What did Comte de Mercy think of all this? He was in a peculiarly delicate position, for no one knew better than he that Kaunitz was not only extremely jealous of any one on whom the Empress seemed to depend, but was habitually suspicious even of those to whom he himself was sincerely attached. A private correspondence, so to speak over his head, would not meet his views at all; yet at the same time Maria Theresa had a right to expect answers to any and every question she chose to address to her ambassador on the personal and private lives of her own children, and to prescribe absolute secrecy on affairs which were so essentially her own business. Prince Kaunitz knew as well as Comte de Mercy, that strong-minded, simple, and sincere as she was, the Empress was far removed, both by principle and the habits of a long experience of statecraft, from any inclination

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to send orders direct to one official for whom another was practically responsible. An Englishman who knew the Prince well says that he was not only very clever but far above mean subterfuges or falsehoods; he was also full of "childish vanities" and he certainly was remarkably eccentric. He was inordinately vain of his personal appearance, and his ablutions after meals before leaving the dining-table were of a peculiar, not to say painful, description. A fine rider, cultivated, artistic, a Latin scholar, and equally well acquainted with English, French, and Italian, he played one of the principal parts in the European history of the eighteenth century. Prince de Ligne, who knew him more intimately than most people, has left some amusing reflections in his memoirs. "His locution, and his accent, correct in the four languages which he knew perfectly, rendered his conversation more impressive than taking. On thinking it over, one perceived that he possessed no striking characteristic, nor any imagination: but by dint of considering himself the first personage in the universe he had ended by almost becoming so. . . . No one can imagine his unique and unexampled vanity. . . . I presented to him a Russian *grand seigneur*, to whom he suddenly said: 'I advise you to buy my portrait, Sir, because they will be very glad in your country to know the personal appearance of one of the most celebrated of men—the best rider, the best Minister who has governed this Monarchy for over fifty years—a man who has heard everything, knows everything, and understands everything!'"

Prince Kaunitz was *par excellence* a statesman, while Comte de Mercy steadily deprecated any such claim on his own account, modestly and consistently declaring that his own particular talents lay almost exclusively within those bounds pre-

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scribed by a diplomatic existence necessarily at a distance from the place of his birth or up-bringing. He possessed that incalculable boon, an even temper; the only sign he ever betrays in his writings of passing annoyance consists in the employment of even more stilted and ceremonious language than that of which he habitually made use. Anything more grandiose than his reply about the "little objects for writing" (he probably considered he had plenty of big ones) it would be hard to imagine, and the phrasing connected in one's mind with a Sir Charles Grandison or a Sir Roger de Coverley assumes an abrupt and colloquial complexion in comparison with the following communication:—

I am, in effect, conscious of the motive of the order given me by Y.H. to keep up a correspondence with the Cabinet, to which I had in a certain fashion turned a deaf ear up to now, seeing, as I did, nothing advantageous as regards the service; moreover my style of thought removes me from all these trifling and indiscreet methods of enhancing my value. It was soon after my arrival in Paris that Monsieur de Neny wrote to me to address to him periodical sheets for the Empress. . . . I was also bidden to deliver letters from H.M. to Madame de Brionne, to the Duc de Penthièvre, and especially to the Nun de Beauvau.[1] I acquitted myself exactly of these commissions and also of some connected with the toilette, as also of some small gratifications destined by Her Maj. to persons who had dedicated their works to her: but my replies were limited to those subjects. Monsieur de Neny insinuated in his reply that it would be agreeable to Her Maj. to find amusing details in my letters adapted to gratifying her curiosity as to what goes on in this country. I preserved silence on this point and added nothing to my letters: in future I shall be less reserved as to anecdotes of "la cour et la ville," and your

[1] Madame de Beauvau, a nun in Paris, was sister to Prince de Beauvau and connected with Lorraine. She was very rude on one occasion to Mr. Walpole, who observed that he had known her parents. "I am glad that Monsieur had the—the—the *advantage* of knowing . . ." "L'honneur, Madame!" screamed Madame du Deffand.

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Highness will always receive a précis of my letters, as well as of those that the Cabinet secretary may address to me. I begin to-day to inform him of all that relates to the trousseau of the future Dauphine: I add the particulars known to the public touching Madame du Barry: Your Highness will find the copy reduced to an extract in order that you should be less wearied by the perusal of these rhapsodies.

In rendering accounts from 1770 to 1780 of his writings of this quasi-private nature, Comte de Mercy frequently alluded, more or less contemptuously, to those splendid epistles which became the chief resource of the Empress during the last ten years of her life, and are the principal source of information to-day on Marie-Antoinette:—

Monseigneur, by to-day's messenger I address to the Empress a report, as voluminous as it is unimportant, on the Dauphine's daily occupations—it would be easy to put it into few words, but H.M. wants details and I notice that the longer they (the reports) are the more they are approved.

And again:—

The Empress deigns to write me a letter in her own hand, filled with observations on the Dauphine, and assurances of her satisfaction on the care I take in everything concerning that young princess. If my despatches on her account were as interesting as they are long, H.M. would have reason to be satisfied. I send her to-day a report of fifty pages, of which I am really ashamed.

Later on, about the autumn of 1771, when Madame Adelaide's fatal influence was at its height, the watchman's animadversions became more forcible:—

I add, further, that my report to H.M. contains all that is essential. It is very vexing to have to write at length on wretched trifles ("des misères") and to encounter as I do such numerous obstacles to their amelioration.

It may be recalled that Louis XV. was also grandfather by marriage of another of the Empress's

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daughters—the fourth, Marie-Amélie, who had been married the previous year, when she was three-and-twenty, to Don Philip, maintained by the "Pacte de Famille" in undisturbed possession of a Duchy which his mother had been wont, while seeking vainly for a kingdom, to designate "that little hole, Parma." Marie-Amélie started for her new home well supplied with directions as to her behaviour, which proved in the end to be little in conformity with the ideas of her mother, who said that this special daughter had given her nothing but pain from the day and hour of her departure from Vienna. "Make no comparisons," wrote the Empress, "on what is done here and what you find at Parma . . . the Court there is mounted on a very decent and proper footing." Contrasted with the brilliancy of the establishment of a younger sister of fourteen, this prospect may have struck Marie-Amélie as wholly inadequate and unfair, nor could she then have realised (as she probably heard after) that *her* Bourbon bridegroom was not much more stout and foolish and unintelligent in appearance than his first cousin, the Dauphin. Violent and headstrong, she was a continual source of worry to her mother, who took her conduct sadly to heart. And much as the Empress loved Marie-Caroline, she could not approve of all her actions either, and nearly a year before Marie-Antoinette left the safety of her home, the Empress was writing to Baron Knebel in regard to a dawning fear that later developed into an ever-present and painful dread :—

My daughter goes too quickly to work and alarms the Minister: the Queen of Naples equally barricades herself ("se gendarme de même") against Tanucci. What will be the conclusions arrived at—and to my detriment—as to these proceedings of my daughters as regards Ministers? They will be credited with a decided wish to domineer, and

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the consequent reflections on the subject *may well influence the future of my Dauphine.*

The italics are my own. I have always regarded this letter as supplying *le mot de l'énigme.* It gives the clue to much that is hard, sometimes almost impossible to understand, in the attitude of Maria Theresa towards her youngest daughter; it explains in part, if it does not excuse, the severity amounting to injustice on the score of many apparent trifles; and it shows, moreover, how intensely anxious she was, and with cause, too, from the very start. For Prince Kaunitz proved a true prophet. Marie-Antoinette had not been gone a month ere the Empress was writing directions to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau that tallied with the former's prognostications, and perhaps a little also with the latter's fears. The despatches from Vienna found him in an unusually ruffled condition of mind. His official fêtes had lasted for weeks, entailing much fatigue on a delicate man, and costing far more than had been anticipated. Madame de Brionne's absurd pretensions seriously jeopardized the success of the crowning point of the entertainments, a huge ball and supper, the Court and many indispensable guests threatening to stay away; and although the commotion was entirely caused by one of themselves, a Rohan-Rochfort, the angry *élite* of French society had said hard things of, and to, the Imperial representative. Moreover, his position with regard to his friend and guest, Prince Starhemberg, was an uncommonly difficult one, for in the Empress's instructions the ambassador had been ignored. But his equilibrium was not seriously disturbed, although the problem of how to serve two masters without disobeying the orders of the one to whom all his allegiance was due or arousing the ire of the other, to whom he owed

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almost everything, had reached an acute stage. He had enough on his hands, and fortunately details absorbed little of the time demanded by the immense amount of work he got through. Nor was it in the nature of Maria Theresa to *froisser* a faithful servant, however over-anxious and worried she might be herself, and in her own hand she wrote on the 24th of May, 1770:—

I should be very sorry, Comte Mercy, if I had caused any mistrust between Starhemberg and you by the orders I gave to the first to remind you that the journals on the subject of my daughter that you intend to send me through Neny are for me alone and are not to pass through any other channel, and that for further safety you might send them by the messenger who will be despatched monthly to Brussels, from there to you, back to Brussels and then here. That does not mean to imply that Starhemberg is to open or read them. . . . But what I specially wanted to warn you about is that from considerations of secrecy I do not wish even Neny to see them—not that I have the slightest doubt of him, or that I do not confide to him my most important affairs, but because the secret of a third person is such a delicate matter that one cannot take enough precautions, as everything transpires. . . . You can therefore send them by these messengers addressed simply to the Empress-Queen, like a private letter: you can place this inside a cover to Neny, and if anything more secret remains, add it on a separate sheet. Every two or three months you will send me a private report that I can shew, but the journals will be for me alone. I will burn them myself, for they must contain particulars which would make many unhappy. . . . If you find other and safe means I shall be charmed to receive more frequent news even direct—but always sealed and in Neny's envelope. Starhemberg, to whom I have written the same orders as for your separate sheets, has no information whatever of my having written to you, having only alluded to (what happened) after his letter was written to Neny. I have been obliged to write all this in great haste, having my room full. I fear you will have some trouble in succeeding to decipher this, and I am obliged to hurry to catch up the messenger, who has started.

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A few days after Prince Starhemberg's departure, Comte de Mercy gave his own views to Kaunitz :—

He (the prince) stayed with me, and spoke several times of the reasons which render Flanders an agreeable destination to him. . . . The day before his departure he received (by the Brussels messenger) a letter from the Empress, and he told me that our Sovereign's intention is that I should address direct to H.M. and under cover to Monsieur de Neny all the reports I shall have to make on the Dauphine. Independently of this, whether the Empress herself recollected her total forgetfulness on my account in the private orders given to Monsieur de Starhemberg, or whether Monsieur de Neny contributed a reminder, H.M. has judged it apposite to write me the enclosed letter (copy) to which is adjoined that of my reply. I shall have the honour to communicate in succession to Your High. anything interesting that this correspondence may produce, but in order not to bother Y. Ex. with minute details I shall only present these in the form of extracts, unless Y.H. may order otherwise. . . .

It is quite clear that the Empress, who was the least complex of people and whose personal pleasures were few, intended to pursue a very elaborate scheme of her own construction for keeping herself informed as to her daughter's daily life; and, considering that the poor child had been sent to France before she had been taught to write or spell, and that wonderful tales were brought by travellers to Vienna and reported in the *Gazette*, over which the Empress spent many anxious moments, it is not surprising that she desired to establish a reliable source of information. In furtherance of this scheme she bestowed her entire confidence on Comte de Mercy, assisted by the Abbé, both on the spot; partially on Prince Starhemberg, who, although located in Brussels, had many connections in France and might prove useful, and in a far lesser degree on Prince Kaunitz, whose own domestic arrangements could not be

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regarded as an unqualified success from her point of view. The Emperor disapproved of the system *in toto* and declined to look at any of the letters. Even the two secretaries who spent their lives in her service and continually under her own eye were not equally enlightened. The chief one, in fact, knew far less than the second, who was occasionally permitted to read extracts from the ambassador's reports. "Monsieur de Neny," as Comte de Mercy, a Fleming, writing to an Austrian, calls him in the affected style of the day, was an Austrian also, Baron Cornelius Neny, a Staatsrath and first confidential Cabinet Secretary to the Empress-Queen. His Sovereign, in whose service he had passed his life, wrote of him thus:—

> I esteem him; he is extremely attached to me. He is without pretensions, most disinterested, a great worker, clear and prompt: honest, Christian and charitable. He has a good heart and judges others by himself: hence he is often taken in. He is a facile talker, and that is why he has never seen any of your despatches or narrations, even the ostensible ones. Directly the secret of a third person is concerned I am very circumspect. I must know my company. Prince Kaunitz sees your letters to me, excepting those for myself alone. No one has seen these but I and Pichler, and Starhemberg a few.

Carl Joseph, Freiherr von Pichler, was apparently more silent and reserved than his confrère, but both were equally "mon fidèle Pichler," "mon fidèle Neny." And judging by their letters to Comte de Mercy, who treated them perhaps a trifle *de haut en bas*, but always kindly and *en grand seigneur*, they entirely merited the Empress's confidence and his regard. When the principal one died as the result of an accident in 1774, Comte de Mercy wrote regretfully to the Empress that she "lost a zealous and devoted servant, and he a friend of thirty years' standing, to whom he had

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been attached by the bonds of a very special friendship." And two years before this, when Baron Neny very suddenly lost his "worthy and virtuous wife," the Empress grieved as though one of her own relations had died, observing that he was "so full of feeling that she was very anxious about him." Six months afterwards, she arranged for him to go to Paris, apparently with the joint purpose of distracting his thoughts and of relieving her anxiety about Marie-Antoinette.

She refused all solicitations to fill Neny's place, and promoted Pichler, who must have had his hands full. It must be confessed that the Empress's semi-private correspondence was carried on on so complicated a plan that it is almost hopeless to follow all its twists and turns. I had been for some years attempting to do so before it dawned on me with a shock of surprise that Mercy, the remarkably truthful and devoted Mercy, appeared on the face of it to be playing a kind of double game. His usual manner of extricating himself—with remarkable dexterity, too—from a tight place was by all the appearance and a good deal of the reality of a crystalline candour. Here, however, he seems to have departed from his rule. It would as ill become us to liken the Empress to the deep sea as to mention Prince Kaunitz in the same breath with Mephistopheles. But it must be owned that the ambassador was on the horns of a dilemma. Anything more certain to incense the autocratic Chancellor than the discovery of a correspondence from which he had been excluded would have been impossible to imagine. On the other hand, his personal knowledge of Marie-Antoinette was very slight, and in intimate trifles her mother was unlikely to attribute much importance to his opinion or to seek his advice as she did that of Prince Starhemberg. At

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the same time political questions in 1770 were so subtly intermingled with the daily existence of an Austrian Archduchess married to the heir-apparent to the French Crown, that Comte de Mercy, if he was willing to add the labours of these enormous letters to his ostensible work in order to give his Empress pleasure, had to remember that questions bordering on statecraft must perforce reach her without the Chancellor's knowledge. There is no doubt that the ambassador was in a peculiarly delicate and difficult position, for he owed not only his training but his place to Kaunitz.

The messengers, *courriers* as they were then and probably are still called in France, left Vienna at the commencement of each month. Halting one day at Brussels (then the capital of the Austrian Low Countries) to deliver despatches to Prince Starhemberg and take over his communications for Paris, they reached their destination within eight or nine days from the start. Leaving Paris after the shortest possible halt and returning via Brussels, the messenger was expected in Vienna about the 28th, when the Empress began to be impatient of delays :—

Comte de Mercy, I am much pleased with your reports; I should only desire that the messenger might be always despatched from Paris on the 15th or 16th and reach here on the 28th: in order to give time to answer, for this one only arrived on the 30th, which will oblige him only to leave very late to-night or even to-morrow morning.

This was taken very seriously :—

In order that the monthly messenger may leave here on the 16th of each month it would almost be necessary for him to arrive on the 8th or 9th. The present one only did so on the evening of the 13th: the time for reading and meditation on the contents of despatches takes a day: two, even three, pass before I can confer with the Duc de Choiseul and put *en clair* whatever concerns current affairs.

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Then I begin to minute my despatches for the Chanceries of State and Empire, and for the Governor-General of the Low Countries. I then make my very humble report to Y. Maj. and a rather long detailed account of Madame the Dauphine, that I write with my own hand for Prince Starhemberg. These objects, in spite of the assistance afforded by the Embassy Chancery, demand about three days, thus the week passes. . . . I shall, however, hasten in future with all possible diligence in order that Y. Maj. may be obeyed. . . .

Again:—

Comte Mercy, here is the 30th, and the messenger is not yet arrived. I should, therefore, keep the one who was to leave on the first in order to reply to what comes: this interrupts all arrangements. Endeavour to ensure that everything is prepared for him to start about the 14th: I will write this to Starhemberg, for he also kept him a little this time. . . .

And to the Dauphine also in autograph:—

Madame my dear daughter, at last this eternal messenger has arrived at nine o'clock at night, bringing the dear accounts of you. Heaven be praised that, according to him, your health is good: he was with your suite and thinks you grown taller and stouter.

This emissary and his companions, nearly always alluded to by name, were picked men: Kleiner, Riedel, Gergowitz, Caironi, Wolff, Morenheim, Neumann, are familiar appellations to those who have made a close study of these letters. Later on their places were taken by young officers of noble birth belonging to a Hungarian *corps d'élite*—the object being to afford these young men an opportunity of seeing foreign countries under the most favourable conditions. Above suspicion as the messengers were, the precautions that were adopted in connection with their missions proves Comte de Mercy's perfect cognizance of the ability and number of the spies in the employ of the Cabinet

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of Versailles. The Dauphine's letters to Maria Theresa were brought to the Embassy in Paris by Vermond from Versailles, Marly, Fontainebleau, Compiègne, or wherever the Court, never moved to the capital, might happen to be located for the time being. Similarly the ambassador's private letters to his sovereign passed through neither office nor chancery officials' hands, and were only handed over as the messenger was upon the point of starting on his long journey. On one occasion Sir Robert Keith complained to the Chancellor that the official covers from England occasionally reached him with only copies of the despatches inside. "Que ces gens sont maladroit!" ejaculated Prince Kaunitz peevishly.

It would be difficult to imagine a less secure means of communication than the ordinary posts afforded at the end of the eighteenth century. In fact, to consign any writings to these public conveyances was considered by a number of sagacious persons the surest means of disseminating news that it might be considered advisable to publish. Louis XV., whose incurable *ennui* was only equalled by his curiosity, had established an extraordinary system of supervision by various members of his Governments, in which system he took not only a malicious pleasure but an active part. The "secret of the King," as it was long called, formed the subject-matter of some interesting volumes and need only be cursorily referred to here. It was originally established under the direction of Prince de Conti, succeeded by Comte de Broglie, whose descendant's enlightening work on the subject explains its intricacies. While the Duc de Choiseul was initiated in all its mysteries, his successor d'Aiguillon was kept carefully in the dark, as was also the case with regard to Cardinal de Rohan during his embassy at Vienna,

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where he succeeded and was for a time assisted by the *chargé d'affaires*, Durand (de Distroff), once Minister at Warsaw, and an exceedingly active and intelligent agent of the spy system. Simultaneously with the issue of the routine despatches a cipher correspondence was carried on, often conveying diametrically opposite instructions to the initiated, whose replies were sent to a number of borrowed addresses and names, whence they were re-despatched to the real recipients, through whom such as were considered of sufficient importance found their way to the King. Everybody spied on everybody else; but the Cabinet of Versailles justified its boast that no cipher that ever was invented was sufficiently ingenious to defy its efforts or the skill of the under-secretaries in its employ. On the score of expense the King of Prussia ordered his ministers in Paris to eschew all such unnecessary luxuries as special messengers, with the result that every paper sent from Berlin to Paris and *vice versa*, otherwise than by some ordinary traveller, was regularly opened and copied.

"Intercepts," as they were officially termed, played a large and important part in the history of the eighteenth century; they were regarded as legitimate prey, and the only scruple it is possible to detect in connection with them is the unmistakable chagrin of a diplomatist should he have been conscious of any failure to steal a march on a fellow-labourer in the same field, who might have even further succeeded in reaping some advantage on his own account. Probably the great Frederick shrewdly suspected that a certain amount of tampering with his despatches was inevitable; it is doubtful whether he cared; it is clear that his aversion to any preventive method was due to economy alone. When Marie-Antoinette came to France, a *chargé d'affaires*, Sandoz Rollin by name,

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was established in Paris, and was not replaced until two years later by Baron de Goltz, of whom we shall have occasion to speak later on.

It does not appear either that our Foreign Office expenditure was conducted on extravagant lines. In 1772 the weekly system of King's Messengers from Paris was discontinued: a certain Coates was recalled, leaving only one, Mann, to start from Paris on alternate Thursdays in time for the Saturday "packett boat" from Calais, which was only once—and then with the additional assistance of a "third horse"—reached in the record time of twenty-eight hours. On this occasion, unfortunately, contrary winds obliged Captain Cannon to re-enter the harbour, and finally to abandon Dover in favour of Deal. In addition to these vicissitudes of eighteenth-century travel, Mann fell under grave suspicions, which, however, were eventually considered to have been disproved. He reached Paris on more than one occasion much later than he should have done, carrying "despatches loosely made up, having manifestly been opened." A Mr. Barham at Dover was then communicated with, and the captains of the "packetts" were directed to report secretly by post the hour at which the Messenger left the seaport for the French capital. In further striking contrast to Comte de Mercy's endless precautions were the dealings with the cipher, which, as Colonel St. Paul, the *chargé d'affaires*, reported, was handed over on his arrival "in a thin old deal box with hardly a nail in each hinge and all the appearance of having been opened that way." As he further knew that "among the servants there were four very bad persons about the house" before he arrived, the Duc d'Aiguillon can hardly have been ignorant of many proceedings of the previous Secretary at the British Embassy, who apparently

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had allowed the same deal box to remain for three weeks or a month at a time in an open room with only a few French servants in the house. Colonel St. Paul added that he knew there "is hardly anything the French will not do to get at the foreign ministers' ciphers," and took some credit to himself for his "new strong box, kept in his cabinet in Paris, and carried to Fontainebleau in his own chaise."[1] This was evidently regarded as an innovation in 1774, as was the new arrangement by which King's Messengers on what Sir Stanier Porter, the Permanent Secretary, called the "Paris Station" received 7s. 6d. (in lieu of 5s.) a day when not employed on Posting Service. Their accounts were to be presented punctually every three months at the Office of the Secretary of State in London, but here again Mann was found in fault. He sent in no bills "for over a year, causing much confusion at the office of the treasurer," and was finally recalled, to be replaced by Staley and an unnamed colleague, who, it is to be hoped, proved less susceptible to the rather mysterious attractions of one of the few really ugly roads to be found in France.

Thanks probably to some leakage in Durand's chancery, the "secret of the King" was an open one to the Cabinet of Vienna. Comte de Mercy was, or professed to be (the latter, I think, far more likely, considering the scope of his own information), rather sceptical as to the continuity of any such system, although Maria Theresa herself sent him a hurriedly taken copy of a cipher note from "Broglio" to Durand. Mercy threw doubts on the complicity of Comte de Broglie, whose mock exile at Ruffec and the King's attendant underhand proceedings, intended to throw dust in the keenest eyes, apparently achieved a large part of their object:—

[1] *Colonel St. Paul, of Ewart*, edited by George G. Butler (2 vols., James Nisbet and Co., London, 1911).

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It is impossible to ignore the evidence of this singular and mysterious correspondence regarding which Y.M. deigns to send me two more letters . . . but in asking what can be the motive and aim of this, the question seems difficult to answer. It is beyond doubt that since the Duc de Choiseul directs the Foreign Affairs the King has never opposed his advice . . . from which one may conclude that it has neither a preponderating or an active influence. . . . If one considers further the King's extreme and marked indifference in all matters of business, his distaste for work, his mode of life, barely leaving him one hour a day for serious occupations . . . one knows no longer what to think. . . .

Mercy's personal charm must have been only second to his ability, for he contrived to extract confidences in the most unlikely quarters, and when he made up his mind to subject a person to the peculiar process sometimes called "pumping," the facts thus elicited generally proved to be precisely what were wanted. He gained the confidence of the suspicious, untruthful old King, and he induced that taciturn youth Louis-Auguste to deliver himself of longer and less disconnected speeches than he was credited with making to any one before—or probably after. He twisted Madame du Barry round his finger, and had a noticeably soothing effect on the excitable Choiseul; the Duc d'Aiguillon thought better of it when on the verge of treating the Imperial ambassador to an exhibition of a torrid temper; and Madame de Noailles submitted with exemplary meekness to being continually assured in courtly language how imperfectly she comprehended the Dauphine's character. All that was possible was passed on to the Empress, not always, however, as in the case of du Barry's unvarnished tales, in the pristine state in which these outpourings were received.

The bulk of the correspondence was carried

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on in French, then as now the language of the Courts of Europe. The Empress's sentences, simple, direct, and to the point, occasionally suggest the possibility of German formulation, and she not infrequently used Italian words. This is more noticeable, of course, in her own writings, generally scrawled in a crowd, or against time while a harassed messenger, booted and spurred, awaited his charge; or in those pregnant postscripts she was wont to add after a secretary had handed over his sheets for her signature. These defects of style, as Monsieur Geffroy observed, are undoubtedly due in part to the strength and elevation of her mind. The elegantly turned phrases to which the language *par excellence* of diplomacy lends itself, served its purpose in her official communications. On subjects that affected her as nearly as the well-being of her children, she was too entirely in earnest to express her views and opinions otherwise than with a forcible exactitude that went straight and unerringly to the point. She was one of those happily constituted people who are obviously not troubled with side issues; also perhaps the Imperial attitude, which in her case was born, not made, lends itself to brevity of speech.

Judging by my own sensations after poring for years over these old letters, comparing dates and fitting in the pieces of a complicated puzzle, I rather wonder that anybody's head stood the strain of recollecting who was wholly or partially—and then to what extent—in the principal's confidence. Even the clear-headed Mercy, doubly on his guard if, as it appears, he had confided more to Prince Kaunitz than the latter was meant to know, made a slip one day. More than usually pressed for time, with visitors clamouring, the Abbé discoursing and messengers awaiting

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final orders, the ambassador mentioned some trait of Louis-Auguste to Prince Kaunitz, who in his turn volunteered to the Empress his own opinion on the subject. Her manner of accepting the position goes a long way towards explaining why she was so admirably served :—

The Prince de Kaunitz was not, until now, aware of my private correspondence with you: but as you gave him to understand in your preceding report that you write privately to me about my daughter, not wishing either to make a mystery I communicated your letter to him, charging him to reply in the sense we decided on (without, however, his having seen it). As after this I may consider it advisable to inform him of the contents of a letter, I warn you in order that you may keep a separate sheet only for my information (over and above the secret report, the secret of which is known to no one).

Was this separate sheet copied for the Chancellor's delectation? If so, Comte de Mercy's answer to the above has a Machiavellian tinge, usually strictly reserved for the foes of his Sovereign and the "cabals" and "creatures" who presumed to oppose her interests :—

Without recalling the inadvertence by which I made known to the Prince de Kaunitz that I address private reports on the Dauphine to Your Majesty, I shall endeavour by all possible care to repair this involuntary fault. . . .

To whatever cause we should attribute the sending of duplicate letters to Prince Kaunitz which the Sovereign supposed had been seen only by herself—unless, as sometimes happened, she read or showed him extracts as occasion demanded, always, however, informing Comte de Mercy when she had done so—it is only fair to suppose that the motive was not in any sense a private one. For the lives of both, more or less, and of one especially, were concentrated in furthering to the

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best of their ability the interests of her whom they served so faithfully and well. If they discussed events freely in their private letters, they never made any personal allusions to the Empress that she might not have seen, or spoke of her otherwise than with profound respect. I think we may take it for granted, as she did so often, that their methods were based on her interests and not on their own advantage, and that they strained every nerve to execute each task as it arose by any means that seemed most promising to two remarkable men. The results they attained were all the more lasting inasmuch as the younger diplomatist asked nothing better than to bring all his talents to bear on doing as his chief ordained. "Monsieur de Mercy has no other views than those of Prince Kaunitz," said a shrewd and competent observer,[1] "who has always regarded and treated him as his son." How far he was justified in repeating the Empress's private affairs even to her Chancellor, is a moot point that can only be decided by each individual according to his or her views of such delicate questions. Personally, I know of no considerations that admit of passing on a confidence or breaking an unspoken promise; but then I am not a politician.

Contemporary memoirs abundantly prove that while numbers of people about the Court and in society suspected Comte de Mercy of directing extensive correspondence in many directions, no considerable extracts from his letters transpired during his lifetime. This is all the more remarkable inasmuch as the system of bribery was never more extensive and flourishing than during the reign of Louis XV. The expenditure exhibited more analogy to a stream of Pactolus than to sums of money, urgently required in every other

[1] Comte du Châtelet to the Duc de Praslin, March 16, 1766.

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direction, wrung from an exhausted Treasury and a bankrupt department.

The Ambassador showed conspicuous skill in evading the interception of his letters and preventing copies being taken for the information of Louis XV. Moreover, his choice of secretaries was particularly fortunate. He employed a considerably greater number than was engaged in any other Chancery in Paris, and if we may judge by the opinion entertained of them by their employers, these secretaries were of exceptional calibre. It is certain that the Ducs de Choiseul or d'Aiguillon, not to mention Comte de Broglie and a number of others too numerous to name, would have pounced joyfully on the ambassador's invaluable papers had they had the slightest chance of doing so. His own informations prove how judiciously his secret service funds were expended, and show the network of intrigue in which he lived. With all eyes fixed on him, it is also to be imagined that he would hardly have remained the "dark horse" he was to a certain extent for so many years, had his servants been treated like those in the Royal households, who were in a chronic condition of embarrassment and misery from lack of funds.

The principal permanent Secretary at the Austrian Embassy, which he joined as early as 1756 under Prince Starhemberg, was a fellow-countryman of Comte de Mercy, a certain George de Barré, who was created a hereditary Baron in 1777, and, like his chief, a Fleming also. He died in November, 1783, sincerely regretted by both Mercy and Prince Kaunitz. Baron de Barré's successor was François Paul v. Blumendorf, who, when Comte de Mercy left Paris in October, 1790, never to return, was left there as *chargé d'affaires*, and remained through stormy scenes until the end of May, 1792.

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The Empress herself was not guiltless of using small deceptions when she considered that the vital interests at stake necessitated a certain course of action. She could absolutely depend on Barons Neny and Pichler, and without reserve or any appearance of misgiving she dictated to either her most private affairs—perhaps reserving the more silent Pichler for matters relating to her own family's intimate concerns. As regarded Comte de Mercy and Prince Kaunitz she was consistently open, and when a letter addressed to her by the one was sent to the other to look over, the writer was immediately informed of the fact by herself. The deceptions were reserved for poor little Marie-Antoinette, whose ill-written and worse spelt effusions were constantly sent back to Mercy, with severe comments on the inadequacy of their contents. "Burn it and do not seem to have seen it," was constantly urged. Maria Theresa expressed herself with the utmost unreserve on the subject of all her children alike; it would be a great mistake to suppose that her youngest daughter was any exception to habits that were the natural outcome of their mother's particular views on her numerous progeny.

Three years after Comte de Mercy's voluminous series had been in full swing, the Empress, referring to her son, said, "He has never asked me again whether the correspondence continues or not, wishing one to believe (which is not the case) that directly any of the family leaves, or he does so himself, he thinks no more about them and wishes for no news of them except through the Gazettes. . . ." The writer realised that a good deal of this cynicism was assumed and was, in fact, part of a pose. The Emperor was always trying to stifle feeling to the point of professing to have little or none. He had been deeply wounded

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through his best affections. The wife and child he adored had been snatched away, and the sister with whom he had most in common, Archduchess Josèphe, had succumbed at sixteen to smallpox on the eve of her marriage with the King of Naples. But in spite of endless differences of thought and opinion, her heir was deeply attached to Maria Theresa, who referred sadly, in rare moments of expansion, to friction that tried the Chancellor to the point of asking her permission to resign. Referring to difficulties connected with and objections to her private correspondence :—

> The Emperor knows that you write to me, but not having wished to see them (the letters) at the beginning, even finding it bad that I should keep up this correspondence for my comfort, I insisted no longer. . . . You can well believe that all this gives me no pleasure: but that is my sad position with regard to the most amiable and capable of sons. It is only I who derive no consolation and am often put out ("suis souvent contrariée"). You will burn this letter and judge by it my confidence in you.

No one could have felt more keenly than she did the irreparable loss of their father to these children, placed as they were, before they had emerged from childhood, in highly critical positions. This ever-present conviction underlying every word and action, dictated by the Empress's conscientious character, not only rendered her keenly desirous of leaving no portion of her own duty undone, but perhaps had a certain further effect in causing her to be more severe and exacting with the objects of so much solicitude.

Evidently the Emperor considered that his mother was far too much addicted to discussing her family with subjects, a practice he highly disapproved. But if he did not comprehend, if he judged less accurately, Comte de Mercy was keener-sighted, and unhesitatingly assumed the

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attitude—quasi-parental, semi-feudal, and wholly devoted — attributed by the Empress to her Ministers in their relations with her fatherless children. Their requirements and their illnesses, their appearance and their health, the very clothes they wore and the food they ate, everything in short that concerned them, must, as their mother never doubted for an instant, prove supremely interesting to her Ministers at home and her ambassadors abroad, simply and solely because these children belonged to her. To one who for years has studied these old letters it is easier to feel than to express in words the consciousness they convey of the peculiar form of devotion which Maria Theresa inspired. It called forth all that was most worthy in the many men who made her interests their own. Its quality is perhaps best understood by studying Mr. Charles Greville's description of Lord Melbourne's manner to a Queen of eighteen.

The preponderating influence of Prince Kaunitz, carrying all before it, had alienated Comte Sylva-Tarouca; but the Empress was not unmindful of those who had stood by her and hers through the storms of her early life. "You are as necessary to me," she wrote to the veteran statesman in 1767, "in my old age and decrepitude, as you were in the days of my thoughtless youth."

How royally she accepted the position created by herself, how freely she returned all that she asked of others, and how nobly her trust was repaid, it is one of the chief objects of this work to show.

Moreover, in reality the Emperor was exceedingly indiscreet. No letters from him, prior to 1775, to Marie-Antoinette have been printed—it is supposed they were destroyed—but the later ones demonstrate how openly he wrote through the public posts; and it is well known, moreover, how incautiously

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he spoke to her on his visit to France, making sarcastic personal remarks and finding fault with her before members of her own suite. How these talked and wrote about everything and everybody is one of the most astonishing factors in the general situation.

Had Mercy died before the Empress, whom he outlived fourteen years, she might possibly have had occasion to refer to his confidential papers, which were returned to Vienna from London (where he died in August, 1794) by Comte Starhemberg. It would then have been seen that the autograph letter in regard to the Emperor (recently quoted) was not burnt, as directed, but was returned, as were many of these notes at different times, to the writer herself. But—and it is a large "but"—copies were kept, that of the letter in question being endorsed as follows by the ambassador himself: "Letter from the Empress in her writing, returned by the *courrier* Caironi, 14th Aug. 1773, from Compiègne." During the visit of Joseph II. to France in 1777, the Empress urged additional caution, and her ambassador volunteered "to carry circumspection to the point of keeping no minutes" of his secret notes to herself, to avoid all risk of being commanded to produce any such for the inspection of the quick-witted Emperor. In spite of this, however, the five large volumes eventually consigned to Vienna show no such break in the sequence of the correspondence as would have occurred had this course been adopted. The collection was further increased in 1865 by the private archives of the Imperial family, and this addition included three large portfolios containing the originals of Mercy's letters to the Empress, identical with the copies he had himself preserved.

Comte de Mercy's private papers were returned

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from Vienna in July, 1857, to the representatives of his family at his ancestral Château of Argenteau, near Liége, whence, alas, they have been removed and are now dispersed. Like so many well-known places in England, that property was sold and dismantled, and the fine old house and gardens and the beautiful wooded walks overlooking the Meuse are no longer owned by relations of the great ambassador.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE COURT

On the authority of the third Duke of Dorset, we may take it that in the opinion of the most intimate friend Marie-Antoinette ever had, the Duchesse de Polignac, many of the fatal mistakes committed in later years by that most unfortunate Queen may be attributed to the influence of those whom the Duke very improperly called "two devilish priests." The first of these prelates was the Archbishop of Toulouse, Loménie de Brienne, one of the most incompetent Ministers who ever shifted the helm in a storm and ran the ship of state on the rocks. The second was his protégé—Vermond. Memoirs and letters of the time bristle with abuse of the "Reader," the official designation of one whose functions were allied to those of a private secretary after he ceased even nominally to be an instructor of youth. His labours in Royal circles extended to the year 1789, and lasted long enough to make him one of the best hated men in a Court where those who valued their reputations prayed for mediocrity or oblivion.

At Vienna, under the eye of his pupil's mother, he contrived to inspire that excellent judge of character with the confidence so rarely misplaced in the men who served her and hers with equal fidelity and zeal, and the Abbé became exceedingly useful, almost indispensable, to the Austrian

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ambassador when the scene of action was changed to France. In the chequered years to come, as often as Vermond resigned his post under various pretexts, chiefly on the unanswerable ground that his office had become a sinecure, Comte de Mercy steadily refused over and over again to entertain any such proposal.

While the Empress honoured him with her confidence and mentions him with invariable and unqualified approval, he was no *persona grata* at the French court, where his loud voice and discordant laugh, his low birth and unpolished manners, joined to a tiresome habit of holding forth in season and out on the subject of the princess, were all occasions for severe not to say spiteful comments. When all other offences were exhausted, he was accused of being untrue to his charge. Time, which has adjusted many balances, has demonstrated the unfairness of that particular imputation. Indiscreet in trifles as he had all the appearance of being—as he was on all sides admitted to be—there is no instance to be found of his having betrayed any important secret. Moreover, to the best of his ability he faithfully seconded the untiring efforts of the Imperial ambassador to preserve their charge from the countless pitfalls that beset her unwary footsteps from the outset of her married life. His attachment for the Empress never varied. When three years later he sent in a resignation which was not accepted, he said, "Whatever may be my fate, I shall always have a vivid recollection of the singular goodness with which that incomparable Sovereign loaded me, at Vienna and since my return. The treatment I have met with here sometimes led to vexatious comparisons, but I have never been so indiscreet as to shew it, even to the Dauphine."

It would not have signified if he had. He must have been more transparent than he knew, to enable

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his enemies, the Campans among others, to read his feelings so well. That in the long run Vermond showed many signs of maintaining intact the rare virtue of disinterestedness cannot be alleged. He reaped certain pecuniary and other advantages on which his charge gave him in a certain sense a *lien*; but even so he only copied a universal example set by his superiors, and exhibited on the whole far more moderation in his requirements than they. People who knew him well agree that he was not only grateful, but was capable of forming devoted attachments to those who showed him kindness; such, for example, as the Empress, who, in accordance with the patriarchal traditions of the House of Austria, treated the lowly-born, insignificant tutor with the stately benevolence consistently shown to those far beneath her by this great daughter of the Hapsburgs. Anything more unlike the bad manners and taciturnity of the reigning Bourbons it would be hard to conceive, and on his return from Vienna the Abbé, who was the most tactless of mortals, never ceased extolling the customs and arrangements of the Imperial Court to the obvious disadvantage of those of Versailles, a habit not likely to endear him to a people as vain as his countrymen, and as justly proud of their unrivalled pre-eminence in all questions pertaining to art and taste.

In matters that affected himself he was not specially fortunate, and it is to be hoped that he derived substantial consolation from the unvaried kindness and support of Comte de Mercy, who took a pleasure in transmitting laudatory reports of the Abbé to Vienna and in repeating the Empress's gracious messages to that instructor of youth. It is presumable that all this comforted him to a certain extent for the innumerable difficulties of a particularly responsible and yet an

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ill-defined position. What he called his "brevet" had been sent from Vienna before the Archduchess left, but it was not signed until he had been nearly three months in France, and even then it cannot have ensured him against interference and question, for the nominal "Reader" was a certain Monsieur de Monterif. The latter resided in Paris and contented himself with drawing the emoluments of his post, as he had done in the days of the late Queen, who, being grown up when she married, had no need of a tutor. Certain of Vermond's reports are dictated from the "Grand commun" at Versailles, where doubtless he had leisure and perhaps cause to regret his private table at Schönbrunn, and the excellent and abundant repasts provided by the Empress's own orders. His name alone was omitted from the long list of those of the Dauphine's suite who received presents on her arrival in France, and in addition he was not even paid the expenses of his journey from Strasbourg to Paris. The recital of these woes moved the Empress to authorise her ambassador to inform her through Baron Pichler whether some pecuniary advances would relieve the Abbé's pains; and when this became unnecessary she ordered a service of silver plate for Marie-Antoinette to give to her "Reader." It was not until the beginning of August that Comte de Mercy's patient reminders induced those who were responsible for these appointments to fix Vermond's salary at a sum representing about £500 per annum. However, considering that some of the King's servitors were two years, and the Dauphine's whole household six months in arrears, it is doubtful whether "this ecclesiastic" was as well off in the end as he had hoped. For his long hours of waiting, hanging about in case he might be wanted, were not sweetened by the black looks and the spiteful speeches that greeted his appearance. Five years

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afterwards Comte de Mercy was reminded of the calumnies and the *tracasseries* and the *dégoûts* that had assailed the Abbé on his return, supported by himself, as he added piteously, with "patience and courage" in the hope of being useful to the Dauphine and silencing his enemies by the force of irreproachable conduct. How he was detested by the "Service," *i.e.* the ordinary members of her household, their own memoirs and letters abundantly testify. Foremost among these were the Campans —the late Queen's assistant private secretary, and his daughter-in-law—whose unmitigated abuse is doubtless plentifully tinged by an ignoble sentiment appositely described in France as *jalousie de métier*—a complaint from which even politicians are strangely enough not wholly exempt. Another legitimate cause of complaint was the restricted and sedentary life that his avocations compelled the Abbé to lead, without the advantage of gaining credit for himself or of ensuring the progress of his pupil by devoting several hours daily to her studies. Her day was so filled by ceremonial visits and interruptions of all kinds, that very little leisure remained to spare for the Abbé. The most serious interruptions were caused by the incessant small journeys that kept the Royal Family and their attendants on the move practically all the year round.

The King had been born bored: no one knew that better than the one and only woman to whom he had probably ever given an affection worth having—his governess, the Duchesse de Ventadour. From his earliest childhood she had understood that gloomy character, full of the strangest contradictions: "A child who requires careful handling, for he is not gay by nature, and great pleasures will be harmful to him because he will abuse them." Madame de Pompadour realised

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this to her cost when she tried, as no one else could have done, to amuse the "most difficult man in France." "How time flies!" he said to her and to her alone; yet she once burst out to the Duchesse de Gramont, who afterwards repeated it to Mr. Swinburne, "If you only knew what it is to try and amuse a fool who is always bored (*une bête qui s'ennuye*)!"

His restlessness only increased as time went on. At the beginning of every January he studied and corrected a carefully prepared list of Court moves for the ensuing twelve months, and added a number of minor expeditions, to St. Hubert, the Hermitage, Trianon, and other places. Although the vast expenditure thus entailed was only a comparative drop in the ocean of the national debt, it was sufficiently exorbitant to call down a hail of bitter reproach. It is easy to imagine the indignation of the wretched denizens of the villages and poorer quarters of the towns as an interminable procession of travelling-carriages—"resembling," said one who knew, "the march of an army"—clattered through the narrow, ill-paved streets with a noise like thunder, or floundered ponderously along the miry ill-made roads maintained by forced labour out in the country or away from the beaten tracks, either raising a huge dust or throwing the mud in the faces of those who were in want of bread, work, and the wherewithal to get the common necessaries of everyday life.

The Tuileries had been practically abandoned since the end of 1665, and was now divided into sets of apartments occupied by privileged persons—very much after the style of Hampton Court. Eight or more other Royal residences were the scene of stately progresses rather better regulated than certain of the Court customs. Compiègne was always visited in the summer, and Fontainebleau in all the

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striking beauty of its autumnal foliage later in the year. Besides these—and Versailles, which was considered their headquarters—Marly and La Muette, Choisy and Bellevue, were the scene of fairly frequent residence on the part of the monarch and his family. Later on, Rambouillet and St. Cloud were added to the list, but not until Louis XVI. had abandoned and eventually sold some of his grandfather's properties.

The Court was under orders to move to Choisy on the 10th July, in order that the bride might see what Comte de Mercy called "this pleasure-house." Choisy le Roi still exists — a thriving suburb about ten miles from Paris, as it was in 1770—but all trace of its beautiful little palace has disappeared. It stood rather low on the bank of the Seine, in good but over-formal gardens, and was principally furnished in the Chinese style. English visitors have commented on its beauties, and on its celebrated mechanical table, which when a spring was touched descended through the floor and reappeared covered with clean plates, wine and comestibles of all kinds. This table was made for a little private supper-room of the King's, whose apartments adjoined those of Madame du Barry, and was afterwards removed to Trianon, while the splendid portraits of the unmarried princesses painted by Nattier were hung in the rooms until they were taken to Versailles, where they may be seen to-day.

The young couple followed the King a day later, for they were detained at Versailles by a slight indisposition of Louis-Auguste, from which he seems to have recovered by sleeping for twelve and a half hours on end. He was subject to indigestion, wrote Marie-Antoinette, which was a natural consequence, although she did not say so, of his Bourbon appetite. She not only remained

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to keep him company, although he does not seem to have been a lively companion even when he was in rude health, but tried her best to amuse him, showed him every attention, and passed the greater part of the time in his room. Some weeks later he ate too much *pâtisserie*, and she very wisely had the dishes removed from the table before he had time to take a second helping, forbidding their reappearance, at which high-handed proceeding he merely smiled without attempting a remonstrance. He was following in the footsteps of his predecessors. An illness that attacked the King and Queen years before, and "caused the greatest alarm amongst the public," was due to singularly unromantic causes, revealed by Stanislas Leszczynski in a letter to a friend. Louis XV. "had eaten (*sic*) a great many figs, walnuts and milk" which, while it sounds an odd mixture, pales before the performance of the Queen, who also "had a violent indigestion after eating eighty oysters, with four glasses of beer" on the top. She looks uncommonly robust in her picture at Versailles, by either Belle or Gobert, followed by a page in picturesque Polish dress,[1] and holding a large branch of lilies, which is a prettier association than the oysters and the beer.

It might have been supposed that, considering the limited space available and the numbers entitled to accompany the Royal party to Choisy, Madame du Barry would have been left behind. Comte de Mercy hoped so, but his very proper comments on her presence at La Muette had met with an inadequate response from Prince Kaunitz, whose views of morality differed widely from those of his "cher Comte" and would have horrified his liege lady had they been divulged to her. He had written

[1] *Le Dixhuitième Siècle* (Hachette, Paris, 1909), by Monsieur Casimir Stryienski, who adds charming descriptions of pictures to his delightful books.

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in the true vein of a libertine and a *grand seigneur*, who desires to notice nothing that may interfere with his work or his pleasures: "The supper at La Muette was in truth a very misplaced proof of weakness; *au fond*, however, there is nothing to be said in regard to an annoyance which one shares with the Royal Family, all the more so that it only remains to ignore what one cannot and ought not to know. . . . In one word, everything depends in this best of all possible worlds on one's manner of looking at things. Hence I desire that Madame the Dauphine, in order to see rightly, may always see through your eyes alone. . . . Farewell, my good friend."

Even supposing such philosophy could be inculcated in a very young head, it was fundamentally opposed to Comte de Mercy's healthier, sounder views of life, and he made no comment in his next letter to the Chancellor on a visit Madame du Barry had considered herself entitled to pay one morning at Versailles, or the difficulty of the Dauphine's position when playing lansquenet at the same table every evening at Marly with the adventuress, who on two occasions was actually permitted to seat herself next to the future Queen.

Moreover, Comte de Mercy was in a position to see what Prince Kaunitz probably failed to take into account, well as he had once known the Court of Louis XV., namely, that it was a sheer impossibility for the young Archduchess, as her mother said—"young as she is, with no experience of the world, and obsessed by dangerous people"—to ignore "what one cannot and ought not to know." All the care, all the vigilance of the Empress's faithful servants, were insufficient to preserve the girl from that premature and fatal knowledge. No one was better aware of that fact than Comte de Mercy himself. It was Vermond who discovered that just

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before the move to Choisy some one had enlightened his pupil on the subject of Madame du Barry's present and her horrible past. The ambassador's own observation revealed to him that something had occurred in the apartments of "Mesdames" to throw their young niece into a state of extreme agitation. He at once took alarm and suggested certain "feelers" to the Abbé, being unable at that particular moment to get a few words in private with his young charge. Eagerly seizing on the opening afforded by Vermond's questions, the Dauphine poured out a long history, instantly passed on to the ambassador and addressed to Baron Neny for the Empress's benefit, with a copy for Prince Kaunitz's information enclosed with the Embassy despatches.

The causes that led up to the *dénouement* were well known to Vermond. Foiled in several attempts to insinuate himself into the private apartments of the young couple at all hours and on every occasion, the Duc de la Vauguyon had bethought himself of another mode of regaining lost ground with his pupil by pandering to his ruling passion and immoderate love of field-sports. The Dauphin had long desired to attend the King's hunting parties at St. Hubert, but the drawback to his doing so consisted in the termination, for an unusually long day's sport was followed by a repast where Madame du Barry filled the place of hostess, and brought to bear on the situation the manners and style of conversation of her recent sphere of action at the Rue de la Jussienne, where she presided over the gambling-saloon and the entertainments which enabled that shocking example of the eighteenth-century *souteneur*, Jacques du Barry, to pursue his nefarious career. No wonder Comte de Mercy had reason to write to the Empress that "decency was not always

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very strictly observed" on the occasion of feasts at St. Hubert and the Hermitage conducted under such auspices. The congenial task of introducing the young heir to the throne to such scenes was gladly undertaken by the Duc de St. Mégrin —"a young man who," said Comte de Mercy, "with a quiet exterior, is said to be one of the most vicious persons in existence, and far in excess of his father." Madame du Barry was only too glad to inform the King of his grandson's wish and to urge its furtherance. In 1770, the guests at these parties of pleasure were not very anxious that their names should transpire; but three years later it was very different, for the infatuation of the King, joined to the undefeated impudence of his favourite, had given the latter a certain hold on her position, and it had become a matter of congratulation among a particular set to receive invitations.

The best description of these suppers that I know was written by a foreigner, who, through the kindness of Prince de Condé—always attentive to English visitors—was admitted in 1773 as a spectator at Bellevue. Here the King and eighteen or twenty guests, both men and women, were seated "promiscuously" at a large round table, all attired in a hunting-uniform of green and gold, and waited on by footmen in dirty liveries, assisted in their turn by Swiss Guards, who, without removing their hats, passed and repassed, quite close to the King, as they carried the dishes in and out. "Next to him sat Madame du Barry, like Laïs by the side of Alexander, speaking familiarly and taking pieces off his plate to show her consequence, affecting great affability and talking and smiling all round the table." The King on his side talked most to Prince de Soubise. Several Duchesses were present, with the Prince de Condé and the

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Duc de Bourbon, reinforced by the Duc d'Aiguillon and the old Maréchal Duc de Richelieu.

This new step on the part of their nephew did not suit the aunts at all, and sending for Louis-Auguste they poured into his astonished ears such confidences and details of du Barry's life and origin that he then and there conceived a horror of his grandfather's favourite which time did nothing to dispel. The pity was that in one of those rare bursts of expansion to which extremely reserved people are occasionally liable, he detailed the whole sordid story to his little bride. No wonder she was upset; nothing in her careful bringing-up, sheltered, guarded from knowledge of evil, with religion and duty upheld by daily precept and example, had suggested the existence of such a person as the woman with whom she had found herself confronted at close quarters. No one realised then how strong and lasting the impression so made was destined to prove—not even Mercy when he wrote of Louis-Auguste: "This enlightenment produced so strong an impression on the Dauphin that he has since evinced a marked aversion for Madame du Barry—it is certain that she will never rehabilitate herself in the eyes of the young prince."

Acting under the orders of Comte de Mercy, the Abbé soon elicited that on a certain Sunday afternoon, the 8th of July, the childish couple had had a long talk, which had been preceded by many signs that the Dauphin's boorish coldness and strange aloofness were giving way before Marie-Antoinette's indescribable charm. After what was described to the Empress as an "épanchement de cœur" on the part of her son-in-law, Marie-Antoinette observed: "As we are to live together in great intimacy we should speak of everything without reserve." And then, of all subjects in the world to choose,

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they began to discuss Madame du Barry. For the first time in his life, so far as any one knew, Louis-Auguste spoke out with great freedom on the subject of the Court, giving his opinion of those by whom it was chiefly composed, and adding that he observed a great deal of which he never spoke and was supposed not to know. Marie-Antoinette listened eagerly to confidences to which she was unaccustomed, and by her questions and the interest which she made no attempt to conceal probably extracted a great deal more than the Dauphin had had any conscious intention of divulging. Is it possible to imagine the dulness of the life she had led since her wedding-day, only six weeks before? She herself told Vermond that after the Dauphin had had his say, she chimed in with the remark that "it was very sad to see how far personal motives and intrigues had involved the King in *liaisons* which brought about such disorders at Court and were in reality directed against the Duc de Choiseul." Louis-Auguste, who reverenced his father's memory, and never for an instant then, or after, forgot his parent's hatred of the Minister, rejoined that Marie-Antoinette could have no idea what means Choiseul had employed to attain to his post, or how he had been aided by Madame de Pompadour, who owed her elevation and continuance in her place largely to his support. The bride had been repeatedly warned not to take too decided a line about the mainstay of the Alliance, and she assured Vermond that she had answered cautiously to the effect that Choiseul was considered clever, and enjoyed a certain esteem in foreign countries; moreover, that if he had intrigued long ago with Madame de Pompadour and others, his behaviour could not be compared with "the horrors practised by the Ducs d'Aiguillon, de la Vauguyon, and their cabal."

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This logical conclusion ended the conversation, so far as Vermond was concerned, but it is on the whole to be regretted that he did not report it himself, for it is not to be supposed for a moment that a girl of fourteen, talking with unwonted unreserve in a language with which she was still imperfectly acquainted, would have employed the rather stilted phrases repeated by Comte de Mercy. Marie-Antoinette repeated to the aunts the unflattering opinion of Louis-Auguste, quoting many of his views on his surroundings, of which they now became aware for the first time. Madame Adelaide and Madame de Narbonne were quite unworthy of a confidence they had done their best to evoke, and lost no time in letting the Duke know all that (and probably a good deal more than) the heir-apparent had really said.

Writing to the Empress next day, in the first shock of enlightenment, Marie-Antoinette is more natural :—

> The King shows me a thousand kindnesses, and I love him dearly, but it is pitiable to see his weakness for Madame du Barry, who is the most silly and impertinent creature it is possible to imagine. She played every night with us at Marly and was placed twice next to me; I did not exactly try to begin a conversation, but when it was necessary I spoke.

And meanwhile Comte de Mercy had ended up his letter thus :—

> I imagine that it will please Your Majesty not to betray in letters to Madame the Dauphine that Y.M. is aware of these particulars, because in the case of the Archduchess suspecting that it is I who reported them, she would conceive a certain mistrust of the Abbé de Vermond, which would deprive us of the great advantage, etc., etc. . . .

It is to be hoped that the Abbé's sense of his own utility and the kindness of his patron, joined to the Empress's graciously expressed appreciation

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of his services, consoled him for the difficulties of his position. He does not appear to have helped with the following, which is rendered as close to the original as translation will admit:—

CHOISY: *the 8th July.*[1]—Madame my very dear mother, I cannot describe to you how touched I am by the goodness Your Majesty shews me, and I vow I have never received one of your dear letters without tears of regret in my eyes at being separated from so good and tender a parent, and although I am very well here, I earnestly wish I could see my dear, very dear family at least for one instant. I am in despair that Y.M. did not receive my letter: I thought it would go by the messenger, but Mercy thought proper to send it by Forcheron[2] and this, I imagine, caused the delay. . . . Since yesterday we are here, where one begins the day at one, and dines, etc., until one in the evening (*sic*) without returning *chez soi*, which displeases me much, for after dinner they play till six, then go to the *spectacle*, which lasts till half-past nine, then to supper, and then play games till one o'clock or sometimes even half-past; but yesterday, seeing I could go on no longer ("je n'en pouvais plus), the King had the goodness to send me off at eleven, which pleased me very much and I slept very well till half-past ten.

Your Majesty is very good to interest yourself in me, even desiring to know how I spend my day. Accordingly, I tell you that I get up at ten, or at nine, or at half-past nine; and having dressed I say my morning prayers, then I breakfast and go from there to my aunts, where I usually find the King. This lasts till half-past ten: then at eleven I go to have my hair done. At twelve they "call the chamber" and everyone can come in, all who are not common people. I put on my rouge and wash my hands before everybody: after which the men go out and the ladies remain, and I dress myself before them. At twelve is mass: if the King is at Versailles I go with him and my husband and my aunts to mass: if he is not there, I go alone with Monsieur the Dauphin, but always at the same hour. After

[1] Ritter v. Arneth, the editor of the first edition of these letters, adds in a footnote "entirely in original." Comte de Mercy said distinctly that none of the Dauphine's letters to the Empress were touched by Vermond.

[2] Faucheron's name, which the Dauphine spells Forcheron, appears in lists of the Imperial households as a Gentleman-Usher.

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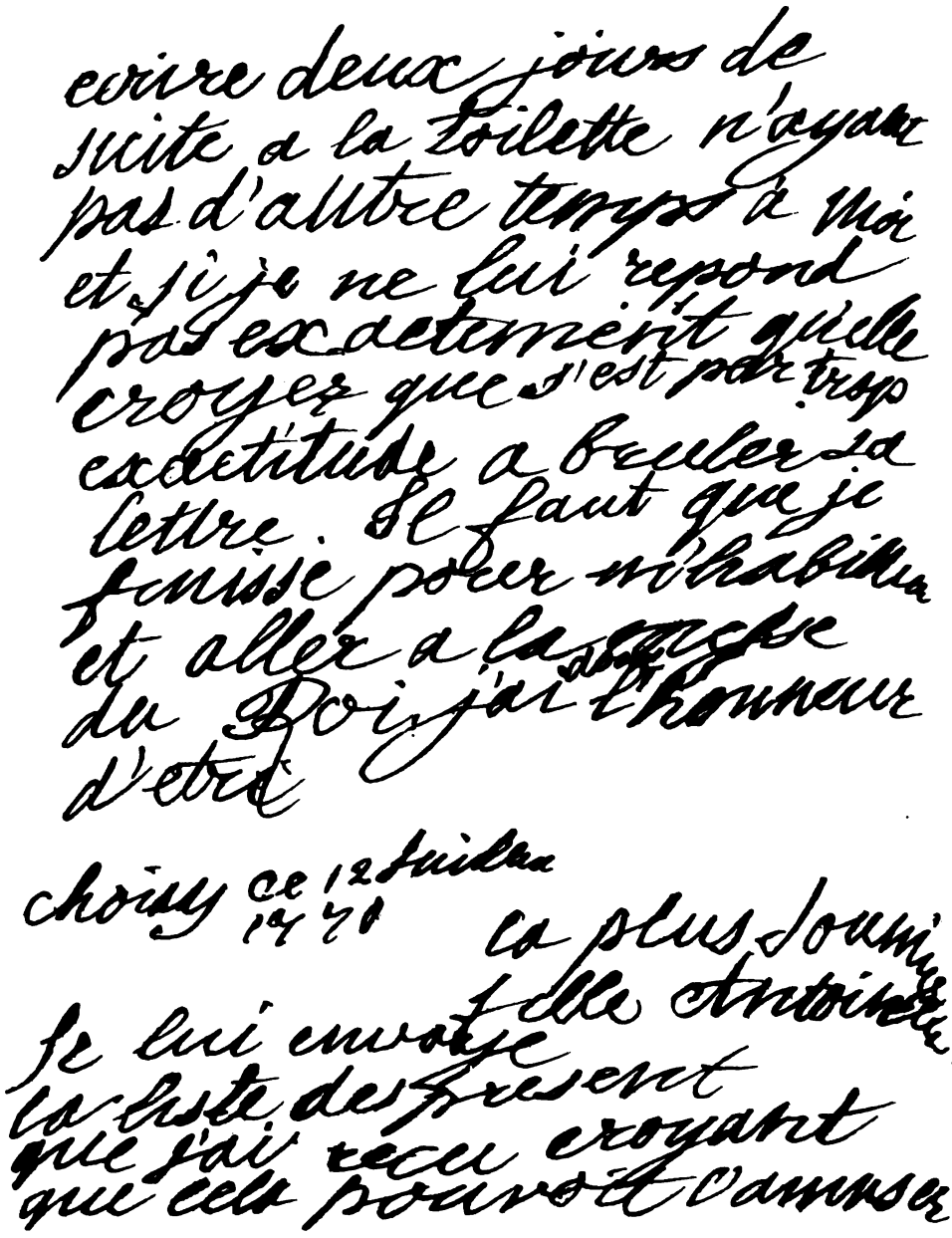

Facsimile of conclusion of the DAUPHINE'S *letter to the* EMPRESS-QUEEN, *dated July* 12, 1770

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mass, we two dine together before everyone, but that is finished at half-past one, as we both eat very fast. From there I go to the Dauphin: if he has business I return *chez moi*:[1] I read, I write, or work, for I am making a waistcoat for the King which hardly gets on at all, but which I hope by the grace of God may be finished in some years' time. At three I go again to my aunts, where the King comes at that hour: at five o'clock the Abbé comes to me, and at five o'clock every day the harpsichord or the singing-master till six. At half-past six I nearly always go to my aunts, when I do not go out: it should be understood that my husband almost always goes with me to my aunts. At seven they play till nine, but when it is fine I go out and then there is no play *chez moi*, but *chez* my aunts. At nine we have supper: when the King is away, my aunts come to supper with us, but when he is here we wait for the King, who usually comes at three-quarters after ten. While I wait, I place myself on a large sofa and sleep until the King's arrival, but when he is not here we go to bed at eleven. . . . I beg you, my very dear mother, to pardon me if my letter is too long, but it is my one pleasure to converse with you. I again beg your pardon if my letter is dirty, but I had to write it at the toilette two days running, having no other time to myself: and if I do not reply very correctly, please believe it is owing to care in burning your letters. I must finish and go and dress myself, and go to the King's mass.—I have the honour to be, your most dutiful daughter, ANTOINETTE.

CHOISY, *12th July*, 1770.

Little as the Empress guessed it, this was the last spontaneous outpouring destined to reach her from one upon whom, all too soon, fault-findings and injustice were destined to tell, to chill the loving heart and intimidate an eager spirit on the very threshold of life. And even now this funny, ingenuous letter did not divulge all that the three days at Choisy had revealed. For there, in the guarded precincts of a King's palace, a Royal bride, in whose honour the visit was arranged, was permitted to come face to face with

[1] An untranslatable expression easily understood. It was used by all the princesses to distinguish their own sets of apartments.

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a woman of the people. It is strange that at the outset of her life in France Marie-Antoinette was brought into such contact, and that at its tragic close she was deserted by all and left alone to face the people once more. If Madame du Barry's presence in the gigantic piles of buildings at Versailles, Fontainebleau and elsewhere was affront enough to all decent people, her forming part of the Court at Choisy was an outrage, and she behaved there as a woman of her kind and class was nearly certain to do.

In the tiny theatre the boxes were reserved for the Royal family, and du Barry, arriving late to witness a performance, found all the front seats filled by the suite of the Dauphine. These naturally declined to cede their places to the belated favourite and her supporters, who loudly demanded the best seats, the inferior ones being crowded by a certain number of Royal servants — pages, grooms-of-the-chamber, wardrobe-women, and footmen — who were admitted only by ticket. Among those who took a prominent part in what rapidly became a heated discussion was a Comtesse de Gramont,[1] who is often mistaken for her sister-in-law the Duchesse of that name, and whose rather distant connection with Choiseul gained her credit, said impartial witnesses, for a great deal more than she had actually said. The measure of Madame du Barry's irritation with the Minister was shown by the King's uncompromising order to the Comtesse, who was unjustly, as it seems, saddled with the sole responsibility for the *fracas*.

[1] Among many less well-informed persons, MM. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt have made this mistake, corrected by the first in a subsequent edition of their *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*. Comtesse de Gramont was mother of the future Duc de Guiche, who married the Duchesse de Polignac's lovely daughter. Their daughter, Corisande, Mademoiselle de Gramont, was much admired in London society of her day, and married the fifth Lord Tankerville. The good looks in advanced life and charming manners of their son, the late Lord Tankerville, are distinct in many recollections of former days at Cannes.

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A profound sensation was created by the news that she was exiled to a distance of fifteen miles of the Court until further notice—*de par le Roi*. Solicited on many sides to interfere on behalf of her lady-of-the-palace, Marie-Antoinette was deftly coached by Comte de Mercy and tackled the King with her usual frankness—she herself was pained that any lady of hers should have been in fault, she did not seek to inquire the King's motives, but could not help feeling that these measures had been taken without any reference to her, the Dauphine, etc., etc.

The King was "extremely embarrassed"—he always was when any one had the courage to speak to him direct—and possibly he read in the frank blue eyes uplifted to his a vague wonder, a suggestion of a questioning regret, that may have given him a momentary suspicion how contemptible his conduct must appear. Of course (he said), the Duc de la Vrillière's duty was to inform the Princess; he would see that such things did not happen again—all followed by vague expressions of affection and regard for the young interlocutor herself. Comte de Mercy hoped all this might be useful; it was of the last importance that the Dauphine should speak often and freely to her grandfather, especially on all matters that personally affected herself or concerned her household. It was the only way to checkmate intriguers; it was indispensable in such a Court where "an illicit *liaison*" was in the ascendant; one had only to see the "espèces" who governed the situation to realise how dangerous it would be for the Dauphine to abandon any of her rights; she must make herself respected by the King and above all must never write, must always speak to him himself—never through intermediaries, and so on. All very well, but not easy.

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Comte de Mercy lost no opportunity of emphasising this point. It was the one way by which the Dauphine could maintain her proper place; for the King, "who has no idea how to refuse anything or anybody when he is spoken to direct, is much less tractable when he writes." This had been a life-long failing with him, and he had adopted the plan with the late Queen, with his children, his Ministers and the unworthy favourites whom he delighted to honour. Directly serious subjects or matters of business loomed in sight, the old princesses, clumsy and maladroit as they were, were sharp enough to see the advantage they derived from playing on this well-known weakness of their estimable parent. Their great idea was that the Dauphine should approach the King only through themselves. The adventure of Madame de Gramont set them off talking for days; and in the general excitement of their private apartments, when about two dozen people joined in a discussion —in which every one talked and nobody listened, except when Madame Adelaide spoke—she and Madame Sophie delivered themselves of some remarks of a particularly incautious not to say unrefined nature. Child-like, the Dauphine chimed in, and only what she had said was repeated (losing nothing in the process) to the King, who showed by a kind of stiffness in his manner to his granddaughter that he thoroughly disapproved of any comments. She, on her side, became nervous and constrained, all the more so when the aunts assured her what a fatal mistake it was to speak to him direct—a mistake he would never forgive. And Comte de Mercy came in for a great deal of criticism which left him totally unmoved, for with the exception of Madame Victoire he thoroughly disliked and heartily despised "Mesdames" and their confidants. Three months later, Marie-

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Antoinette pulled herself together at Fontainebleau, and returned to the charge, having been told that her lady-of-the-palace was ill and unable to consult the faculty as she desired, owing to the fact that Paris was within the prohibited area.

"Madame," returned the King with frigid dignity, "I thought I had already told you that I will give an answer all in good time?"

"But, Papa, apart from justice and humanity, think how painful it would be for me if a woman in my service were to die in your displeasure!"

It seemed that Madame de Gramont was to be spared that appalling fate; the *lettre de cachet* was partially rescinded; her doctor furnished the necessary medical certificate; and the Duc de la Vrillière was commanded to inform her that her demise, if it now took place, would not be embittered by the dark shadow of Royal displeasure. Through clumsiness or ill-will (probably the latter) the Duc de la Vrillière omitted to inform the Archduchess, and she heard the news by accident. The following morning he was summoned to her presence, and was received more than stiffly by a severe young lady, who, drawing up her slight figure, remarked in tones rarely heard from her, "With reference to a request I made to you about a lady in my service, I should have been informed the very first, and by you, of the King's decision. I see, Sir, that you have treated me like a child, and I am happy to tell you that I shall not forget it." The Duke, completely nonplussed for once, stammered some lame excuses which were disregarded, and he had no alternative but to back and bow himself from the room with the best grace he could command. The Dauphine lost no time in thanking the King the moment she saw him, when she received the smiling reply: "Madame, I have executed your orders."

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When all this came to the ears of the princesses, they declared they "could not have behaved so firmly," and Madame Adelaide added enviously and with half-grudging admiration, "It is evident that you are no blood relation of ours."

To assert that Marie-Antoinette was in any sense of the word a perfect character would be not only untrue but ridiculous into the bargain. She had many faults—some due to her age, still more to her bringing-up, and possibly more still to the impossible position in which she was now placed. About this time her high spirits began to get the better of her; she "made jokes about those in whom she perceived anything ridiculous, without any ill intention, and purely through lightness of heart," said Comte de Mercy, adding that the remarks were seasoned with a cleverness that rendered them all the more *piquante*. She also sat very untidily in her chair at her repasts and at the cavagnol; this, as both partook of the nature of ceremonies and were witnessed by the public, was unfortunate. "As a result of the tender interest I take in her welfare," responded the Empress in a letter dictated to a secretary at Mercy's request, in order that he might be able to show it if necessary, "I remember that while she was still here she was inclined to *raillerie* and negligence in her appearance." All this worried poor Comte de Mercy, and added greatly to the responsibilities of his Tuesday peregrinations; and he was greatly relieved when after a flying visit to Bellevue the Court removed to Compiègne, where he was in a position to see his Archduchess daily. On July 30, late in the evening, the young couple arrived there from Versailles, where they had been alone for some days, received a welcome "of the most tender" from the King, with whom they spent an hour, and then went on to supper with the old princesses.

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Madame de Noailles told Comte de Mercy that the time at Versailles had passed very happily, the Dauphine charming every one, and making great progress in the captivation of Louis-Auguste, in spite of the fresh attempts of the Duc de la Vauguyon and his clique to keep the young couple apart. The amusements provided for the Archduchess at Compiègne do not sound very exciting —such as witnessing a stag-hunt from a *calèche* in company with the three aunts, while the King occupied himself so effectually in indicating the way, that Marie-Antoinette (who was very fond of animals and cannot have enjoyed the sight), found herself present at the death of the noble quarry.

A picture at Versailles brings before the reader in all its picturesque interest the *mise en scène* of this particular form of sport, although the Royal liveries do not appear in this representation of a hunt at Ville d'Adam. The hunted stag, taking refuge in a small pond or lake, swims towards a tiny bridge, the peculiar chorus of hunting-horns called the "hallali" is about to sound—one seems to hear the baying of hounds, the swirling of water, the cries of the *veneurs* in their red, blue and yellow costumes. A party of children on the banks are having the scene explained by their mothers in their striped dresses pulled through the pocket-holes, and carrying work-bags slung on their arms. The verdure contrasts with the autumnal tints of the trees, behind which the balconies of the already illuminated Château are covered with spectators. Its owner, Prince de Conti, on horseback, is distinguished by his yellow coat and the order of the Saint-Esprit; but there is a diversity of opinion as to the identity of the fair huntress at his side, in her blue *toquet* and habit of a peculiar brown known as *feuille morte*.

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In an article on Madame de Boufflers, Monsieur de St. Beuve decides that this must be the lady known as the "Idole" of that gay society, while Comtesse d'Armaillé, the biographer of Comtesse d'Egmont, inclines to the supposition that it is intended to represent Maréchal de Richelieu's daughter. As a large percentage of old pictures are wrongly named, and as, in addition, each one is generally attributed by "experts (?)" to several different artists, the identity of a portrait such as this becomes more than doubtful.

The possible effects of an impending meeting at Neustadt between the Emperor and the King of Prussia were occupying the minds of responsible statesmen of divers nationalities. But it is conjecturable whether their solicitude was exceeded by that of the immediate entourage of the King of France during those early days of August, 1770. A secret that was known to over two thousand persons in the palace and beyond its walls was now the chief topic of conversation, and the awful fact had somehow transpired that one of the future Queen's shoulder-blades was more protruding than the other. In spite of this, and apparently quite undisturbed by the nagging of Madame de Noailles and her satellites, the young lady flatly declined to put on a bodice stiffened with whalebone, which was considered indispensable in a case such as hers. No one else, so far as she knew, wore such a garment, and pray why should she do so? No one seemed capable of undertaking to give any reply or explanation to one whose docility, whose aptitude, whose judgment and good feeling, when appealed to in the right way, were generally recognised. Among the several hundred members of her suite there seems to have been literally nobody either willing or competent to influence her about the most trivial matters.

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Madame de Noailles was fain to appeal to the Imperial ambassador, in order that the Empress-Queen, far away in Vienna, might be made aware that no one in France could persuade her fourteen-year-old daughter to wear a stiff bodice.

As the ambassador listened patiently to the lengthy recital of grievances, chiefly self-made, what was the nature of the thoughts that coursed through that acute brain? Madame de Noailles said she had mentioned the matter to the King, who never did or would speak to the Dauphine for her good, while she, the lady of honour, had taken the liberty of suggesting many improvements, although she had not the necessary authority for seeing these carried out, etc., etc. It is significant that the name of Louis-Auguste was not mentioned; far less was the aid of Madame Adelaide even suggested. Comte de Mercy could corroborate the statement about the King, who never had attempted to reprove or correct any of his own children; but Madame de Noailles was less to be believed when she related her own actions. She had consistently "given in to everything, in the apparent hope of acquiring an influence over her young mistress," in which respect she was only courting disaster, for the Archduchess had no opinion of flatterers, and had given many proofs of preference for those who told her the truth. "I try to impress this on Madame de Noailles, and propose to myself to repeat it at every opportunity."

He had ample cause to do so, but nothing he could do or say in the course of the critical five years during which Madame de Noailles remained at her post, was able to instil into her even a glimmering perception of the rudimentary elements of which Marie-Antoinette's character was composed. One has only to see how firm a hold Countess Lerchenfeld had obtained over the mind

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of her pupil in order not only to judge what a very tactful, clever woman might have achieved at Versailles, but also to gauge the enduring harm that was done to the Dauphine through Madame de Noailles's limitations. She was admirable in her actual post, had she only had the judgment to appoint subordinates who understood the nature of young girls in general and that of Marie-Antoinette in particular. The poor Empress, breaking off a discussion of State papers with the Chancellor and the dictation of despatches to Baron Neny in order to consider the question of the *corps de baleines*, had really very little idea what was being made in France of "cette gentille Antoinette—whom I committed to the hands of the King and the Dauphin." More incompetent hands it would have been hard to find.

The only visible amelioration of the situation consisted in the gradual, very slow, improvement in the Dauphin, whose "sombre and reserved character" was yielding to influences gentler than any he had known since his mother died. "Madame la Dauphine does what she likes with him," added Comte de Mercy, further reporting that when she had gone into Louis-Auguste's rooms after dinner he had shown a great desire to talk to her, holding out both his hands when she came in, and that they went on to her apartments, on account of the *menins* who perpetually fidgeted in and out of his rooms. When there was no *chasse*, she drove in the forest of Compiègne—a dull form of relaxation for so young a girl, lovely as the forest is. Her charming manners rarely failed her, and meeting the Duchesse de Choiseul driving with the Duc de Praslin one evening, Marie-Antoinette stopped the procession of Royal carriages in order to converse with the cousins.

The Duchesse de Choiseul seems to have been

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overshadowed in her own day by the dominating personality of her sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Gramont, but she was greatly admired and loved by those who knew her well and took pains to draw her out. There is a charming letter of hers to Madame du Deffand, whom she called her granddaughter, on account of the contrast between the apparent youth of the blind old lady of over seventy years of age and her own weary-of-life attitude. I have translated this letter because it seems to me such an excellent description of the palaces in which little Marie-Antoinette found herself located :—

VERSAILLES.—I have just torn myself from my bed on account of a hair-dressing begun yesterday. Four heavy hands are weighing down my poor head. This is not the worst, for I hear the irons and curling papers frizzling round my ears. "It is too hot. . . . What *ajustement* will Madame wear to-day? . . . This goes with that dress. . . . Angélique, hurry with the *toquet*. . . . Marianne, finish off that panier. . . . You understand that it is the great Tintin who desires this so? . . ." Someone takes great pains to clean my watch with an old glove, and asks me to notice that the back is still black. This is not all. An officer perorates on the expulsion of the Jesuits: two doctors talk, I think, of war (or wish to fight one another): an Archbishop shows me an architectural design: one wants to attract my notice, another to engross my entire attention. Someone cries from the next room: "Madame, there is the three-quarters! The King will be passing on his way to mass." "Now then, quick, my cap, my coif, my muff, my fan, my book—let us scandalize on one . . . my sedan-chair! my porters! Let us start!"

I return from mass. A woman of my acquaintance enters almost at the same moment: she is in full dress, and my small dressing-room is overflowing with the amplitude of her paniers. She bids me continue writing. "I shall do nothing of the sort, Madame, I could not disregard my own interests to the extent of depriving myself of the pleasure of seeing and hearing you." At last she goes; once more to my letter—they come to tell me that the messenger is starting for Paris and ask whether Madame la Duchesse has

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no orders for him. Yes, certainly, I am writing to my dear child—let him wait. A young Irishwoman comes to ask a favour I shall not grant, a manufacturer to return thanks for a boon I did not obtain; this one wants to present his brother whom I shall not see; down to Mademoiselle Fel, there is not a creature but comes to see me. I hear a drum: the chairs in my ante-room are thrown over, it is the officers of the Swiss Guard precipitating themselves into the Court. The *maître d'hôtel* comes to ask whether we are ready. He warns me that the *salon* is full of people, that Monsieur is in, and has asked for dinner—come then, I really must finish.

This was the home and the existence in which little Marie-Antoinette was expected to carry on an education that had barely commenced ere she left the safe environment of her own people and her own country. Almost daily some fresh if petty intrigue occupied Comte de Mercy's anxious attention. One of the most promising opportunities for machinations was the occasion of a vacancy in the Dauphine's household, from the eagerly-sought-after appointments "of honour" to those of the bedchamber women, the four first of whom, recruited from the ranks of the *haute bourgeoisie*, performed their service by twos, for alternate fortnights, replaced in emergencies by their deputies among the twelve under-women. The moment any possibility of vacancies suggested itself, a number of petitioners brought to bear on their claims all the pressure that they were able to command, and the difficulty of suppressing undesirable candidates without giving offence and causing fresh commotion was a problem that it seemed almost impossible to solve. As a rule Madame du Barry and her supporters filled all the available places; a proceeding which, in the case of his Archduchess, Comte de Mercy made it one of the objects of his life to frustrate. The appetite of the "cabal" for seizing on these appointments had

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just been gratified by the nomination of Madame de Valentinois, the favourite's eccentric friend, as *dame d'atours*, virtually Mistress of the Robes,[1] to the future Comtesse de Provence—greatly to the chagrin of the Dauphine, who had hoped to see the Duc de la Vauguyon's daughter-in-law pacified by the promises of the post.

Marie-Antoinette was alive to the necessity of guarding against du Barry's nominees, and detested those of the Governor, but was as yet unconscious of the follies of "Mesdames," who, "ill-instructed as to facts that had tormented her ceaselessly," wrote to the ambassador to ask the King's leave to appoint one Madame Thierry, wife of a favourite *valet de chambre* of the Dauphin—"both creatures of Monsieur de la Vauguyon," declared Comte de Mercy indignantly. He also suspected another reason for the Dauphine's willingness to fall in with her aunt's views, but was far, indeed, from guessing how the Thierry couple were destined in the dark, dreadful days of the future to prove their fidelity to the Royal couple they had served as children. Seeing the Dauphine worried by the Dauphin's frequent absences at the hunting suppers previously described, Madame de Noailles rashly advised her young charge to obtain the King's leave to attend these herself! Even Comte de Mercy was unable to decide what course to take, and wisely invoked the aid of the Duc de Choiseul, to whom he gave a good talking, besides providing Vermond with a paper of instructions with which to fortify the Dauphine. She herself subsequently described her interview with the Duke to Mercy as they walked up and down the terrace that connected her own rooms with those of Madame de Noailles, at eleven o'clock on an August night. The Duke,

[1] Each princess had a household very similar to that of a Queen of France.

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it appeared, had recapitulated what his friend was always impressing on the Princess with regard to the King and the Dauphin, the necessity of speaking out, and at first hand, without showing embarrassment or fear, and of being as natural as possible; that when the next important place in the household fell vacant, she should not hesitate to say by whom she wished it filled, and so on, and so on; that by this conduct, and by avoiding Court intrigues and maintaining patience and discretion, "she would see all France at her feet."

The interview lasted nearly an hour, and the girl interpolated questions and remarks that astonished the Minister, who, the audience at an end, hastened to report its tenor to Comte de Mercy, to whom he said: "It is only now that I feel I know the Dauphine. On your word I placed myself at her disposal and gave her all the information I could. I am enthusiastic about this young princess: she has not her equal for her age, and when the opportunity presents itself I beg you to tell her that I am absolutely at her orders and that she shall command me as she pleases." And with even greater gratification the ambassador reported to the Empress what "perhaps the ablest man in France, who knows best the Sovereign and the Court" had said of Marie-Antoinette. The Duc de Noailles, "un homme à citer," was persuaded that Marie-Antoinette, whom he had observed as narrowly as he could, would one day govern the King, whose tastes were weakening with age, and who, when he returned to the bosom of his family, would not be proof against the charms of Madame the Dauphine. And there is no reason to doubt that but for the most unfortunate accident of Madame du Barry, events would have turned out precisely as prophesied by the King's old friend.

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CHAPTER IX

EDUCATION

KING LOUIS, the fifteenth of the name, suffered from a mysterious complaint apparently fashionable in the eighteenth century. He seems to have been subject to it all his life, for at a very early period his governess, the Duchesse de Ventadour, writing to Madame de Maintenon, said: "You will laugh at me if I tell you he has vapours: nothing, however, is more certain—he had them in his cradle."

Another very dissimilar member of the Royal family was similarly affected, if not when she was actually in her cradle, at least when she had not left it very far behind; and there is no disguising the fact that Marie-Antoinette Josephine Jeanne de Lorraine d'Autriche, born an Archduchess of Austria, a princess of the Holy Roman Empire, married to the heir-apparent to the throne of France, was bored to extinction.

While the Empress despatched long, anxious, scolding letters from the Burg and Schönbrunn; while Comte de Mercy spent all the time he could snatch from his secretaries and his interminable writing and dictating, in rolling in his great coach between the Petit Luxembourg and Versailles; while the Abbé, faithful, *gauche*, and tactless, produced book after book and list after list of lessons; while Madame de Noailles harangued and

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preached in her *longues phrases à queue*, with deportment and etiquette for her sole themes; while the aunts inveigled their unsophisticated niece into a dozen snares which they carefully avoided themselves; while the Dauphin hunted and shot and apparently forgot that he had taken the cares of matrimony on the shoulders of sixteen; while the old King looked on through half-shut black eyes, hardly knowing whether to be irritated or amused, and the great crowd laughed and chattered and joked—little Marie-Antoinette flitted about the vast palaces and gardens, lonely, unoccupied, misunderstood. Too brave to own to the Empress that the welcome extended to her in France had been in any degree wanting in warmth; too loyal to the conditions that had been imposed on her before she left Vienna to let any one guess how far the stout, clumsy boy to whom she was married was dispelling her youthful dreams of a paladin — the girl presented a curious study in the drawbacks of extreme youth and inexperience incongruously allied to indefinite responsibilities.

Inconvenient paroxysms of ill-timed laughter, and a most unfortunate propensity, partly due to sense of humour and partly to childishness, to see and comment in season and out of season on the comic side of people, sometimes gave place to suggestions of those royally fine manners that afterwards distinguished her who was destined to develop into the most admired Queen in Europe. Under the veneer of silliness and frivolity must have been a charming disposition, for the little princess bore no malice when, as it seems, every one united to worry her with a whole host of instructions, which, had her education been more thorough or had it been completed, would have been quite unnecessary, even after the abrupt transition from

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a pinafore and the schoolroom, to a wedding-ring and the first place in that splendid and stormy Court. Her apparently inexhaustible spirits gave place for no apparent reason to that special bugbear of nervous highly-strung people—fits of deep and apparently meaningless depression. But were these attacks of low spirits, to which, poor thing, she was subject all her life, really so difficult to account for? Had she not ample ground for revulsions of feeling in the incomprehensible attitude of the husband, to whom without any volition of her own she had been united? The careful student of her early history is irresistibly inclined to indulge in speculations as to what her life would have been had she married a different man. Over the water the daughter of the Duke of Mecklenburg led an easier if less splendid existence married to King George, as upright, moral, and religious as Louis XVI., and good-looking, possessed of a strong character and intensely domestic into the bargain. Queen Charlotte was greatly and rightly respected, but she was also not a little feared, and was never loved like the Empress's youngest daughter, who, under happier conditions, might have developed in the heyday of gorgeous prosperity into the noble personality that in unparalleled adversity she eventually became. The princesses' "Reader," Mademoiselle Genet (Madame Campan), who was at this time closely tied to her post, was in a position to hear their niece freely and not over kindly discussed. The aunts used to "get tired of the rather petulant gaiety" of the Dauphine. In other words, they were neither kind nor wise enough to make any attempt to understand the inequalities of a complex character. A great many of those persons who are conspicuously good for something in their prime were probably sometimes uncommonly silly at

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fourteen. Had Marie-Antoinette had with her at this, the critical period of a most difficult life, any one who loved and understood her, and was in a position to bring insight and sympathy to bear on the task of training her in the way she should go, how different her history might have been!

Comte de Mercy had not failed to recognise the real reason of her complacency in the matter of Madame Thierry, the mother of "a very pretty lively little boy of four, whom, by reason of the passion she has for children, the Dauphine is very glad to secure," and who, in conjunction with a rival attraction of five, caused a great deal of racket and disorder which was only slightly repaired on the appearance of the Abbé and his books. The first little visitor seems to have been a kind of fixture, and the cause of much distraction in the midst of serious occupations. The following year Comte de Mercy waxed even more eloquent on the subject, Madame de Misery's son having brought with him a sister of twelve: "The Archduchess spends the greater part of the day with these children, who spoil her clothes, break the furniture, and bring the utmost disorder into the arrangement of the apartments. . . . The extreme vivacity of Madame the Dauphine renders serious occupation all the more necessary: when H.R.H. has given herself up to dissipation for several hours on end, it is impossible to get her to fix her attention. . . . When she is talked to immediately after her reading, one finds her disposed to listen, and to reason with the most just appreciation of every subject. . . ."

"She was always very fond of amusing herself with children," wrote the Empress, perhaps wilfully drawing no inferences from a trait which was shared by all her own favourite sons and daughters

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alike, and which those who knew Marie-Antoinette best have averred amounted to "a passion." The Archduke Ferdinand fell ill from grief at the death of his eldest child, and years after the loss of her little boy the Queen of Naples never approached the subject without breaking down—sorrows of which no one spoke or wrote with more affectionate sympathy than their youngest sister. This love of hers was destined to bring her the crowning grief of her life.

We wonder, now that more is known about Marie-Antoinette's private life, why no one tried to provide her with suitable companions of her own age. Madame de Noailles was not only given a free hand by the King, but had not far to look, for within the precincts of the vast Hôtel de Noailles in the Rue St. Honoré (nearly opposite the church of St. Roch) the admirable and cultivated Duchesse d'Ayen was educating six daughters under her own eye with the aid of a governess, Mademoiselle Marin—an uncommon form of education for those days, when every girl was sent to a convent. Any one of these charming girls, Mademoiselle de Noailles, Mademoiselle d'Ayen, Mademoiselle de Maintenon, as they were called, would surely have proved more congenial and profitable associates than Madame de Misery's ill-brought-up family. They were permitted to enjoy themselves at St. Germain, and to ride on donkeys without the absurd fuss and publicity that harassed poor little Marie-Antoinette at every turn. It is to be supposed that Louis XV. would have welcomed sensible recreations for his granddaughter with those of his oldest friend, the Duc de Noailles, one of the few remaining associates of his youth who had the courage and strength of mind to tell him truths which, to do him justice, he did not appear to resent.

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Years later, when Mademoiselle de Noailles was the wife of her cousin, the second son of "Madame l'Etiquette," and Mademoiselle d'Epernon had married the Marquis de Lafayette, the unpopular old Duchesse de Noailles solicited for her last-named granddaughter a place as lady-of-the-palace to the young Queen. The appointment was most unsuitably conferred instead on a little Vicomtesse de Polastron, of whom, had he been there to see, Louis XV. would probably have said, as he did of the Duchesse de St. Mégrin, that "she was too young, and far too stupid." The resulting disaffection extended far beyond the great family whose relation had been rejected, and one wonders whether the Maréchale Duchesse de Mouchy ever reflected sorrowfully over her own past mistakes, or had any notion how much harm and sorrow might have been spared had she permitted her lonely charge to make friends in those early days and to bind over to her interests, through her intense desire to be cared for for her own sake, faithful adherents who would have followed her fortunes to the bitter end. When she came to France, Marie-Antoinette was surely young enough to form ties that would have influenced, even if they had not altered, the course of that chequered existence. The ambassador, an unusually kindly-natured man, probably felt a pang when the Archduchess told him with her usual "admirable candour" that she quite recognised the faults and want of character of "Mesdames," but that they were her only resource as regarded society—"du côté de la société." Was it so very surprising, under such conditions, that she yawned and laughed and whispered with the dowager Duchesse de Chaulnes, notorious for the freedom of her conversation and the oddities of her behaviour? Although over sixty years of

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age, the Duchess was meditating a second marriage with one Gyac, a young *sous-commis* in a bureau, who was apparently indifferent to being made the laughing-stock of half France on taking a bride who declared that "une duchesse a toujours trente ans pour un bourgeois."

Comte de Mercy-Argenteau—a delicate man who took an arduous life seriously and whose only available resting-time had been the enforced leisure of long journeys at a period when travelling from Paris to Vienna was a high trial to robust people—presented at forty-nine the larger number of those characteristics commonly summed up under the appellation of "an old bachelor." He not only had no special liking for children, whom he considered chiefly from the point of view of troublesome interruptions to important business, but he also had a marked aversion to dogs, other than as indispensable adjuncts to field-sports, one of his favourite relaxations. He gives the impression of including both children and dogs among the superfluous nuisances of life—a category of which most of us possess a special private edition of our own. Unfortunately, the pretty young lady whom Providence and the Empress had placed in his charge was extremely fond of dogs. Her natural and healthy craving for playfellows is abundantly proved by the means of amusement which, in default of relaxations suitable to her age and disposition, she provided for herself, regardless of the stately remonstrances of the Imperial ambassador, the lectures of Vermond, and the shocked face of Madame de Noailles, whose ideal was the late Queen, Marie Leszczynska, and who had apparently forgotten what it feels like to be young and gay. Perhaps she had never been either the one or the other; some people are born old and careworn. Her lively charge still occupied the suite of rooms

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chiefly associated with the late Dauphine on the ground-floor of the gigantic palace of Versailles. Even the requirements of 1770, though not to be compared with those demanded by modern ideas of luxury or of ordinary comfort, proved these rooms to be inconvenient and far too small. It is difficult to imagine what would be the result *à l'heure qu'il est*, were a young princess, bubbling over with health and spirits, suddenly asked to stow herself and her suite and her multifarious possessions within such narrow limits.

To have added to the inconveniences of her surroundings by depriving herself of the constant company of two pet dogs, described to the Empress by her ambassador as "fort malpropres," would have seemed to Marie-Antoinette unreasonable indeed. Her pets scratched holes in the tapestry and damask coverings of carved and gilt-framed chairs and sofas, covered the parquet floors with the marks of muddy feet, and tore their young mistress's dresses when incited to a romp, only interrupted by audiences to a Coadjutor-Archbishop or a Foreign Envoy-plenipotentiary. Undeterred in the smallest degree by the bad manners of her favourites, their owner airily proposed to Comte de Mercy that he should forthwith procure from Austria two or more of the then fashionable lap-dogs, called "mops," whose snub-noses figure in a large number of portraits of the time. A wish from such a source being tantamount to a command, Comte de Mercy's disapproval of the suggestion was as frigid as considerations of etiquette permitted. Reading between the lines of the elaborate phrases, we see how he invites the attention of his Sovereign to her daughter's frivolous tastes: "I informed Her Royal Highness that the channel of the messengers unquestionably furnished a means." It is permissible to imagine

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the sensations of that hapless emissary, loaded with embassy bags and weightier responsibilities, finding himself at the last moment encumbered with the care of two valuable and probably irrepressible pugs.

Mingled with the comic side, as is so often the case, is a good deal of a quality that can only be described as pathetic. How seriously they took her; how they shook their wise heads and muttered fatefully about her little amusements; above all, how sadly devoid of common-sense were all those who were, as Comte de Mercy emphatically was not, in a position to ameliorate the situation and to recognise that a more natural life and some sensible latitude would have made just all the difference in the world.

At the same time, Comte de Mercy's over-anxiety on the possible results of any little departure from beaten tracks was more than justified by results. To quote one instance, Madame de Misery took advantage later on of the notice paid to her children to inveigle Marie-Antoinette into granting interviews in the woman-of-the-bedchamber's rooms to various applicants for places and favours. A certain Marquise de Laffare was received in this manner, unknown to Madame de Noailles, through whom alone such audiences were authorised. A complaint of this kind brought to the King's notice by the lady of honour would have resulted in the instant dismissal of the offender. Undeterred by the rebukes dictated by Mercy to the Dauphine, "La Misry" (as he calls her) returned to the charge and laid herself open to a severe reprimand by the young princess in the presence of the entire "interior of her service." All of this is only another among innumerable proofs of how inadequately the heads of the various departments of the household discharged their

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duties, as a foreign ambassador was obviously not the person to indicate the proper procedure in any such circumstances.

The de Misery children do not seem to have been particularly well brought up; there was comparatively little difference in age between the elder of the two and the married lady whose dissipations fail to strike one as very serious. Although the Abbé was a daily sufferer from these innocent orgies, he was less portentous in his report of his pupil's proceedings. He said, sensibly enough, that her French, although not idiomatically perfect, was so good, her language so well chosen, that she expressed herself with regard to remarkable events "so easily, so agreeably, so nobly" that her diction was far preferable to grammatical precision. Finding his "little course of French" received with daily decreasing marks of interest, he wisely substituted the charming "Letters of an old man to a young prince," written by Comte de Tessin for a Crown Prince of Sweden. So far reassured on the matter of secular readings, the Empress opined that "Bossu," as she was pleased to call the Bishop of Meaux, was admirable, and inquired further which of the two devotional works she herself had given to her daughter was in common use—a book of prayers composed by the late Cardinal de Noailles, or a little treatise entitled "The Spiritual Year." The "Moral bagatelles," described by Vermond as equally amusing and instructive, do not necessarily convey either attribute to the uninitiated mind, and ere long gave place to memoirs of former reigns, the Dauphine expressing pleasure in discovering the "names, posts and the origin of people"—possibly these themselves were less gratified—"who are now at Court."

After this she read, apparently for the second time, certain letters of a mother to her daughter—

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with the replies—observing with wholly unconscious irony, considering to whom the remark was addressed, that these "*although very amusing*, convey good principles and morals." With deep respect for the revered Empress, one would imagine that no child of hers could possess any genuine desire to read such letters in addition to the large number of more than severe epistles addressed to herself; especially as about this time the Dauphine's confessor, Moudoux, not to be outdone by a brother Abbé, prescribed the daily perusal of two pages at least of the Book of Tobit supplemented by a paraphrase. This was, however, presumably devoid of the tragic suggestions conveyed at the present day by the bare mention of a work published by Pierre Bouquet in 1772, entitled "Provincial letters: an impartial examination into the origin and constitution of the French Monarchy." The book was suppressed not long after by an Order in Council—the censor, Le Brun, losing his post of Secretary to the Chancellor. Mercy writes a critique of his own on the work in question, joined to some salutary advice to the future King and Queen—all curiously prophetic, and impressing the latter to the extent of eliciting some of her oddly shrewd impartial reflections on her husband, who, she thought, "possessed a decided predilection for justice, order and truth, joined to sense and good judgment"; but she herself feared the effects of "indifference, and want of sensibility in emotions," in short "a deficiency of nerve without which one neither thinks nor feels sufficiently acutely to act with efficiency." This, as the sequel proved, turned out to be all perfectly true.

Eckhart's "History of Rome" was received with scant favour; and although she pronounced the "History of England" "very interesting" she took

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several years to read it, and rather unkindly relegated its author to the ranks of historians of doubtful veracity, apparently for no better reason than that the poor man happened to be "un Protestant," a profession of faith which the young student decided to be incompatible with the writing of superior history—even that of the writer's own Protestant country. The long and short of the matter was that Marie-Antoinette then, and through her life, hated reading with a force and fervour sufficiently intense to inspire with amusement those who regard books as one of the most fruitful sources of the abiding pleasures of life. Madame de Noailles, Vermond, as well as Comte de Mercy himself, all remarked on many occasions that the Dauphine had no taste for books, "even for novels and frivolous works." After she became Queen of France we find the Empress bemoaning her youngest daughter's "dégoût pour la lecture," adding candidly, "common, as I must confess, to nearly all my children."

Mr. Hume's history was widely read in France, where he himself, having been attached to the British Embassy, was well known. In September 1777, Comte de Mercy probably forgot that the work had figured in a list which he had sent to the Empress long before, for he recorded that the Queen "was fairly advanced in the compilation of the Sieur Hume, and had deigned to comment to him (Mercy) on the most remarkable traits of this history." As she had begun it in January 1773, it is to be presumed that this was not a record literary feat even for her. The book made intermittent appearances, and, truth to tell, stood about as much chance of being read from cover to cover as the famous waistcoat intended for the King had of being finished. As the pretty worker said herself, in one of those natural bursts

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of gaiety which were generally nipped in the bud by some one or another, she hoped that by the grace of Heaven this garment might be ready in about twenty years' time.

It is not surprising, if one thinks of the ordinary means of amusement at the command of healthy normal upper-class boys and girls, that going out hunting in a closed carriage with the three aunts, and romping in small sets of rooms with children and dogs, failed to satisfy the lively Dauphine. Louis-Auguste was generally out hunting or shooting, and when he returned from either was far too tired by his exertions or his hard riding to make his toilette, or to keep awake. When the Dauphine walked from Marly to Versailles she found huge crowds awaiting her, "transported with admiration," says the ambassador. She, however, was transported in another sense, and the admiration probably changed to disappointment if not to anger—the temper of the crowds even in those early days not being of the best. The future Queen suddenly ran away, vanishing in the swift and graceful manner peculiar to herself—"comme un éclair." "There were too many people," she subsequently explained, laughing. She made up for it later on; no one ever faced a hostile crowd, alone too, more bravely than she.

To her long-cherished wish to be allowed to ride, the King, who had been previously approached by the Duc de Choiseul at Mercy's request, tempered his refusal by giving her permission to ride a donkey:—

> This compromise in no way displeasing the Dauphine, orders were given to search everywhere for very gentle and tranquil donkeys, and H.R.H. proceeded into the forest attended by the ladies of her suite on mounts entailing no sort of danger.[1]

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Empress Maria Theresa.

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So successful was the expedition that the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois joined the party, further reinforced by "Mesdames," who must have looked rather out of place among all these children. The crowds rushed into the forest to waylay the Royal party, the only member of whom took the trouble to notice any one being Marie-Antoinette, who stopped and addressed a few remarks, "with the goodness and grace which never fails her," to any distinguished person she happened to perceive.

The question of how she was to get any fresh air or exercise oddly escaped the Empress, who, uncompromising as usual, wrote :—

> I tell her *en passant* that if she had asked my leave to ride, I could never have approved of it even on a donkey; I see the King spoils her.

The approaching visit to Chantilly was a cause of fresh anxiety to Comte de Mercy, for he was unable to go himself and to edge in his valuable councils "à propos rompus," as he expressed it; yet he knew that in a party specially got up in honour of the Dauphine by the second Prince of the Blood Royal, the most prominent guest during the two days' visit was to be Madame du Barry! The Prince had held aloof until now, and many remarks were made on the sordid spectacle of a grandson of the great Condé showing himself the assiduous host of such a woman and on such an occasion. All Comte de Mercy could do was to beg the Duc de Choiseul to keep a close look-out, warning the Archduchess to address herself to the latter in case of need—surely an all-sufficient commentary on the incompetency of her own suite. The visit passed off without a hitch, and du Barry seems to have kept out of the way of those whose chief desire was to evade her. This was more than she did a week later, when a fête was given by

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the Duchesse de Mazarin, the beautiful and clever heiress, Jeanne de Durfort, who brought to her husband (already Duc de Villequier) the Duchy of Mazarin. At Chilly the Dauphine was irritated by her hostess's ostentatious attentions to du Barry, and declared to the Empress that the Duchess had "laughed at them," *i.e.* the Royal guests. There seems to have been a foundation for the first charge, for Madame du Deffand says: "It would be hard to exceed this *heroic* baseness and absurdity."

About the middle of August, a lady[1] of a great family in Austria arrived on a short visit to France, and was presented at Compiègne to the Archduchess, whom she found, as she subsequently informed the Empress, "indescribably amiable and charming: with cause to be contented with her position." Unluckily the visitor was not permitted to talk in private, nor given any facilities or indeed much time for doing so. She had the courage to tell those concerned among the Dauphine's ladies that she considered the young Princess not only unbecomingly dressed, but very badly turned out, adding other details which one might have thought some one at Versailles should have had the tact and good taste to attend to. Added to this, one or more visitors from Brussels to Paris reported in Vienna that the Dauphine was "très mal mise," and that her figure was not good. Whereupon the Empress, setting aside the affairs of an Empire and two Kingdoms, not to speak of those of her nine other children, wrote and offered to send "bodices stiffened with whalebone" by the messenger (probably the same who brought the pugs), and added, "You tell me you sometimes wear your trousseau dresses; *which have you kept?*" Pending the reply, Countess Windischgrätz returned to Vienna and

[1] Countess Windischgrätz.

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was summoned to the Hof-Burg. Although very "défaite" by the long journey, she retained sufficient presence of mind under severe cross-examination to expatiate on the Archduchess's charms before admitting reluctantly enough, being an exceedingly charming person, that the ill-natured criticisms were not without foundation.[1] "Being unable to refuse to reply truthfully to my questions"—with the Empress's eyes fixed severely upon her no wonder she was embarrassed—"she owns to me that you neglect yourself, and she thought your figure had deteriorated."

Importance was naturally attributed to this opinion, for Countess Joseph Windischgrätz, *née* Erdödy, was one of the most popular and admired members of a most exclusive Court. She was much liked by the Imperial family in general and in particular by the Emperor Joseph, who when she went to Florence for her health eulogized her to his brother, the Grand-Duke of Tuscany, as "a woman of rare merit, in whom I have never seen the smallest pretension: she listens to and is governed by reason. There are not many of her sex of whom one can say as much." (Or of His Majesty's own for that matter.)

It is a thankless and ungracious task criticising Madame de Noailles. She was a striking instance of virtue and charity, and had never failed in her life to set a much-needed example of those qualities that command the respect of society in general and promote the most successful form of family life. She was adored by the poor of Paris who came within her sphere of action, and by the country-

[1] It is probable that it was Countess Windischgrätz who told Countess de Paar that the Dauphine's complexion was not improved, for in October, 1770, the Grande-Maitresse said to Lady Mary Coke that "she was extremely sorry they obliged the Dauphine to wear rouge; for she could assure me she had the finest colour in the world—if anything, too much."

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people round Mouchy-le-Châtel. She was never mentioned by the most gay and irresponsible votaries of fashion except in terms of deepest respect, was a devoted wife, and had brought up her children with great success. She does not seem to have been unpopular like the Duchesse de Noailles, that special bugbear of Comte Philippe, who fell out with his sister-in-law whenever they met. The lady of honour had been a great favourite with the late Queen, who left her in her will a set of panels in the Chinese style, with figures of Jesuits and Chinamen (says Monsieur de Nolhac) painted by Marie Leszczynska herself for a little room at Versailles filled with Oriental porcelain. These works of art are still preserved at the seat of the Duc de Mouchy. The director-general of palaces, Monsieur de Marigny, also had orders to consign to the Hôtel de Mouchy, Rue de l'Université, a considerable amount of the Queen's own furniture, but Madame Campan's story that a cut-glass chandelier of great value had to be returned at the King's request is an effort of her imagination. It was never sent, being Crown not private property, which the Queen had no power to leave away even had she desired to do so.

But we must return to the consideration of Madame de Noailles as regarded her functions. Before three months had elapsed, Comte de Mercy entertained no doubt of her unfitness for her post as it was then constituted. There was no fear of the Dauphine allowing herself to be inveigled into any party except the undesirable one of her aunts, least of all into that of Madame de Noailles, who "has not and never will have the smallest influence over her. . . . She would like me to speak at every moment to the Archduchess because she dare not do it herself. I have represented all there is to be said, but quite uselessly, because she

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has neither the wits, nor the judgment, nor the *coup d'œil* requisite in the post she occupies. . . . This lady of honour carries out her charge as regards ceremonial, but one must expect nothing more."

In truth, the advantages were rather negative. She placed no difficulties in the way of the efforts of the ambassador and the Abbé, rather endeavouring to give them whatever facilities depended on her. She also served the purpose of keeping out one of the undesirable candidates of Madame du Barry's selection, ever ready to pounce on any coveted post. Unfortunately Comtesse de Noailles was specially useless as regarded two of the greatest of the many dangers that assailed her charge, viz. "Mesdames" and Madame du Barry herself. The first actively disliked their late mother's trusted friend, and lost no opportunity of making themselves disagreeable where she was concerned. They were so rude to her when she desired to get a place as lady of the palace with the Dauphine for her niece, the Comtesse de Guiche, who had refused to enter the household of the princesses, that poor Madame de Noailles was "quite disgusted." She had probably touched Madame Adelaide on the point so near all their hearts, viz. etiquette, for the princesses ceaselessly strove to usurp some of the privileges of a Queen to the detriment of the gay careless child to whom these belonged by right. Madame de Noailles had nothing to learn on such questions; and, indeed, might have given the princesses a very good lesson on the procedure of the Court, which she had at her finger ends. She was universally conceded to be the model, *par excellence*, of a great lady of the *ancien régime*, and as such she would have been simply invaluable to a grown-up well-educated Dauphine; but "to run" (to use a colloquial expression) a backward

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frivolous girl in the schoolroom, nominally a married woman, and actually the first lady in France, was a task far beyond Madame de Noailles's conception or powers. And when the difficulties of surmounting the daily blunders and interference of "Mesdames," due for the most part to the audacity of profound stupidity, were overcome, there still remained Madame du Barry and the King—a situation bristling with complications.

There was a third factor, perhaps even more potent for good or ill. For over half a century it has been an open secret among those who have consulted reliable authorities that for seven years Marie-Antoinette was in a delicate and perplexing position. How cruelly she has been attacked was always known; how unfairly was only realised later: MM. de Lescure, de Goncourt, and notably Monsieur de la Rocheterie, were among the first to do her justice. How well she behaved in critical conditions quite apart from and beyond her own cognizance or control, preached at, abused, even ridiculed, is now generally conceded. She was equally scolded for amusing herself with unsuitable young people and dogs, for her dislike of reading, for her want of application amid ceaseless interruptions and with no privacy. She was told not to ride on grounds of health, to which an open-air life would have been of incalculable benefit. If instead of the harmless little natural amusements for which she craved she had taken to testing the power of her unusual fascinations on various members of the Court, what would have been said? Madame Campan's story of the tactless old lady who worried the Queen until she at last elicited the impatient response, "For Heaven's sake, Madame, leave me in peace, and know that no heir to the throne can be in danger," may or may not be true; but it tallies with facts. That she suffered intensely even from

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the first, Comte de Mercy well knew; and honourable character and loyal friend as he was, he never touched to Prince Kaunitz on more than the fringe of a subject upon which he was often and fully consulted by the Empress. Ample evidence of the most reliable kind still exists in the reports of the Spanish ambassador, preserved in the Archives at Madrid, giving the strangest details — culled chiefly from spies.

Had the birth of Marie-Antoinette's poor children taken place sooner, how different the fate of two, at least, might have been! There is little reason to suppose that had they been asked they would have endorsed Prince Kaunitz's opinion on "this best of all possible worlds." For them it proved to be but a sorry place. The first Dauphin, Louis, died at Meudon when seven years old, of rickets that brought on a bad curvature of the spine and cruel sufferings inadequately treated. Madame Royale lived to ossify into a cold selfish character, revering the memory of her father as much as she detested that of her fascinating, warm-hearted mother, so infinitely superior, had she only realised it, to Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte herself. The fate of the only one of the children who resembled his mother in looks and character, the little Duke of Normandy, one prefers not to dwell on, even in thought, after he passed his fourth year. Probably the happiest member of the quartette of children was the baby Sophie-Hélène-Béatrix, who lay in state in a salon of the Grand-Trianon, under her gilded coronet and her velvet pall, before she reached the end of her first year.

But we have wandered far from 1770, when the Dauphine was still herself a child, busily weaving the brightest hopes into all her dreams of an unclouded future. A crisis in her relations with her chief lady

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was brought about by Madame Adelaide, who incited Marie-Antoinette to send Madame Thierry to Comtesse de Noailles to announce her own appointment as a woman-of-the-bedchamber and her orders to commence her duties forthwith. Such an irregular proceeding cut Madame la Comtesse to the quick, for independently of all else, the rules on the subject were very strict, and no newcomer could discharge any duty in a Royal household without taking an oath of fidelity, after which the appointment was formally registered. Not unnaturally, at a time when differences of rank were observed with an uncompromising rigidity of which in these free and easy days we hardly dream, the future Maréchale-Duchesse rose up in arms, with all the blood of the Arpajons and Noailles at fever-heat, and told the Dauphine straight out that a Comtesse de Noailles was "not made to take her orders from a waiting-woman."

Duly appraised of this *contretemps*, Comte de Mercy repaired post-haste to Versailles, where he found the lady-of-honour "as much piqued as discouraged," bent on resignation, and only occupied with a long list of the Archduchess's misdemeanours prepared for the patient ear of her best friend. To all these plaints Mercy quietly acceded; there can be little doubt that Madame de Noailles had ample cause for vexation, for her charge was wilful and hasty, taking actual pleasure not only in mortifying and defying the Comtesse, but in curtailing many of the rights and prerogatives of her post. The ambassador let her have her say out, and then quite honestly, but with much tact, proceeded to enumerate the points on which the Archduchess could not be held responsible, where she was only obeying directions or listening to insinuations from another quarter. He concluded by pointing out that, had his own advice, repeated

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over and over again to Madame de Noailles, been acted on by that lady—advice founded on his superior knowledge of the character of one "who could never be managed by flattery and subservience"—matters could not have reached their present pass. "I succeeded in calming the Comtesse entirely," he added; he then repeated the whole conversation to the Duc de Choiseul, who, in an interview that same afternoon with the Dauphine, laid further stress on the value of all these counsels.

As was so often the case, all Mercy's ability and tact resulted only in what might be regarded in the nature of a Cadmean victory. Attempting to reconcile wholly irreconcilable elements must have been a weary task. About a dozen or more portentous blunders marked the tenure of office of the lady-of-honour, and it is quite evident that no one could well have had less idea of managing her rather wilful charge. The latter took deep offence when she was given unmistakable proof later on that Madame de Noailles had given her a garbled version of an interview with the King —"an account full of lies," said the indignant Archduchess. Mercy and Vermond never varied from their conviction that Marie-Antoinette herself was so open and sincere, besides being so quick, that it was the worst possible policy to try and take her in, as well as being wholly useless. Yet Madame de Noailles, without a grain of the ability of the first-named, had not the common-sense to obey the axioms thus clearly laid down and often repeated. The Dauphine was so angry that the ambassador had some difficulty in calming her:—

In spite of her defects it is perfectly certain that Comtesse de Noailles is the member of the Court who has least drawbacks in her special place . . . but she has so little character or cleverness that it is impossible to make her see reason as

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regards the best means for discharging her duties. The only advantage I derive consists in placing her in opposition to Mesdames.

Then, in due time, the Empress chimed in with:

What you tell me of the two ladies appointed to the Comtesse de Provence should convince you what precautions are necessary: what a difference between those two and Madame de Noailles! I grant you she wearies you by dint of wishing to do right, but she remains a woman who is by reputation sincere, and attached to you; that is a great point; and among those belonging to the first houses, where will you find some one perfect, neither intriguing nor tiresome?

Where indeed? But all this did not prevent the Dauphine, who, as her mother said, was spoilt by the King and greatly admired by the public, finding Madame de Noailles very tiresome indeed. She harped on "l'étiquette" on all and every occasion, until the young princess said she should have been christened so. Marie-Antoinette's spirits led her into endless difficulties; in default of any one suitable and congenial to laugh *with*, she was perpetually accused of laughing *at* some one or another, and of making witty remarks at the expense of those who should have made allowances for her lonely position, even more perhaps than for her youth and inexperience—instead of resenting, as they did with a bitterness that now seems inexplicable, what was due simply to a light heart. She had what to the great, and indeed to all those who occupy prominent positions in life, may prove a dangerous possession, doubtful certainly, unless it is carefully controlled and regulated by circumstances—a keen sense of humour. Those who are gifted with it can answer for its utility in getting its possessor out of a tight place, but from a worldly point of view I am inclined to think that a total absence of it is rather an advantage than otherwise.

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It is probable that half the political speeches that are made every year would remain undelivered if those who make them had any sense of the absurd. Men as a rule accuse women of being noticeably deficient in this quality; Marie-Antoinette seems to have had enough for two, which in some ways was fortunate, as Louis-Auguste, like most of his family (excepting the Comte d'Artois), had very little.

Certain French authors of great distinction are inclined to pronounce Comte de Mercy too hard on the old princesses, too ready to attribute all the blunders and the almost daily quarrels to their influence and interference. But facts speak strongly against them, and altogether in favour of the view he took of their empty heads, imperious characters and jealous mischief-making dispositions. "Mesdames never having themselves known how to behave are little suited to direct a young princess," he wrote about this time to Prince Kaunitz, and it is evident that the soothing remarks addressed to the Empress were sincere, for he adds:—

> I continue to have to report much good and little of the reverse about the behaviour of the Dauphine: the worst consists in her listening to the advice of Mesdames. . . . She neglects her appearance, and is bored with ceremonial, which she avoids too often . . . but she pleases the King, gains a marked ascendancy over the Dauphin, who is gentle, amenable, even confiding towards her: in short, she avoids intrigues and no longer gives recommendations broadcast.

Her manners were quite unlike those of the French royalties, who had made it a rule not to speak to any one presented for the first time, however desirable it might seem to do so. "Mesdames" assured their niece, who was accustomed to the graciousness of her mother's receptions (vouched for by all English travellers of the time), that it was

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quite unnecessary for her to say a word. The result was that on the appearance of the Ducs de Biron and la Vallière with Maréchal d'Armentières —"all members of the King's intimate society"— the Dauphine ate her dinner and played her cavagnol in solemn silence, as portentous as it was unusual and "made a certain sensation." No doubt the Duc de Chevreuse, introducing two deputations a month earlier, and Comte d'Eu would have been treated with Bourbon frigidity, "of which all France complains," said Mercy; and the Duc de Choiseul enlarged on "a Court where the princes receive badly all those who approach them." Happily on that occasion Vermond had intervened, and the deputations from the town of Paris and the States of Languedoc withdrew, charmed by a reception to which they "are too little accustomed."

The Court arrived at Fontainebleau for its autumn residence there while some of the equipages of the Dauphine were still on the road from Versailles. She therefore sent for the director of the royal buildings and walked for three hours in the gardens and park, asking questions on all the details of the different portions of "these vast and ancient buildings," making very sensible observations of her own in return. But the novelty of such promenades soon wore off, and the extent and beauty of the walks and drives in the grand old forest suggested other means of locomotion. The donkeys reappeared, and mounted on one of these under-rated animals Marie-Antoinette disported herself happily among the rocks and ferns and the rabbit holes of the wild and beautiful park. "She prefers this last amusement, and procures it for herself at least three or four times a week. What is exercise for her is very fatiguing for the ladies of her suite, but they are so attached to her that they take a pleasure in

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whatever gives her pleasure." Here it is to be feared that Comte de Mercy was not so correct as usual, for he said elsewhere that the "promenades were very *pénibles*"; and he certainly did not inform the Empress what the Gazettes told her with many exaggerations, that the Dauphine had had a fall. It is to be supposed that some of the great ladies, by no means in their first youth, whose duty it was to follow wherever Marie-Antoinette went, sighed for the good old days of a staid elderly Queen who never dreamed of leading a suite into such predicaments; and who would still less have gone into fits of laughter when her saddle turned, exclaiming: "Go and ask Madame de Noailles what is the etiquette when a Queen of France falls off a donkey!"[1]

The Dauphin, who had shown some of the sluggish feeling described in the letter to Prince Kaunitz previously quoted, so charmed the silly little Archduchess that she flew without an instant's delay to communicate to Mesdames Adelaide and Sophie, reinforced by Madame de Narbonne, what Louis-Auguste had said. These in their turn repeated the speeches to every one they came across until, said the exasperated ambassador, the Dauphin's inmost feelings "became the news of the day":—

> Not knowing how to touch on so delicate a matter with Madame the Dauphine, I saw, nevertheless, that I must take action, and I thought it advisable to observe that I had felt lively anxiety on hearing of a rumour from Paris that she and the Dauphin had had a quarrel—a rumour which I had at once realised to be an invention, because, had the remarks quoted been actually made, it was neither natural nor possible that either the Dauphin or Dauphine would have confided them to any one.

Her Royal Highness showed signs of embar-

[1] I believe this was first repeated by the Abbé Georgel.

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rassment—no wonder!—but without any *détour* or attempt at excusing herself replied:

"All you have just said is only too well founded, and comes from my imprudence in making confidences to Madame de Narbonne—but how could one suppose there are people sufficiently chattering and indiscreet to publish such things?"

"This frank avowal," continues Comte de Mercy, "led me on to own my surprise and pain: should such rumours reach Your Majesty's ears, I said that nothing would calm the misgivings that must arise." Softening as he went on, he proceeded to expatiate on "the intimacy of married life as a sacred secret in which no motive whatever can excuse a break; in fact indiscretion might be quite sufficient to annihilate for ever the confidence between husband and wife, give rise to injurious rumour, and, in view of the timid and reserved nature of the Dauphin," and so on—all admirable and sensible, but, as the shrewd little Dauphine probably knew, quite beside the speaker's personal experience, putting out of account the fact that he was not the person to say it. Then he bowed himself out, having, as he perceived, succeeded in giving his Archduchess a good fright.

Peace, however, was of short duration. On September 29, the ambassador's keen eye detected certain signs in the private apartments indicative of an understanding—"quelque arrangement sur le tapis"—between H.R.H. and "Mesdames," although the utmost secrecy was maintained, and neither Madame de Noailles nor any one of the "Service" was apparently better informed. But Mercy's sources of knowledge were many and varied. From some among the highest occupants of the various Ministries and Chanceries to one of the under-bedchamber women and two pages of the chamber in the Dauphine's household, he seems

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to have got information in unlikely quarters, and before the close of that day was informed that Madame Adelaide had aroused Marie-Antoinette's old wish to ride a horse, although the former was perfectly aware of the strength and nature of the Empress's objections.

Let us hope the Princess interfered from good-nature, and not, as it seems, for the mere sake of meddling. She undertook to get the King's consent, and in fact did so, with difficulty. One of the chief equerries of the *petite écurie* was instructed to have a steed waiting at a place indicated in the forest, where the cavalcade of donkeys would arrive in due course. "All this pained me very much, and I found, as I so often do, that whatever is blameworthy in the Dauphine's conduct is due to the promptings of her aunts. I know positively and must do her this justice, that when it was proposed, she did not try to hide her strong wish to ride, but feared to displease both Y.M. and the King." She was reassured by Madame Adelaide, and the project was carried out, the equerry holding a long leading rein, while a number of other persons walked beside the horse of the Archduchess, "who was overjoyed at this fresh exercise."

Comte de Mercy kept away from the palace for two clear days (he had hired a house in Fontainebleau itself), because he had been told that the Dauphine said mischievously to the Duchesse de Chaulnes that she "was curious to see the ambassador's face."

All this was suggestive of a spoilt child: other people's spirits can be very irritating to those who are more evenly constituted, and who do not happen to see anything specially humorous in what may send any one very young, and endowed as Marie-Antoinette undoubtedly was with a highly cultivated sense of humour, into repeated paroxysms

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of laughter. When the Duchesse de Duras repeated to her parents the remark about the saddle turning, it gave umbrage quite disproportionate to the nature of the offence. But, nevertheless, such a disposition judiciously guided and controlled held infinite possibilities for good.

Eventually, encased in awe-inspiring dignity, Comte de Mercy presented himself at the evening *cercle* of the Royal family, to find himself at once summoned by the Dauphine, who asked: "Do you know that I have been riding a horse?"

Making a profound bow he answered, "Yes."

Rather intimidated by the dryness of the monosyllable, the Archduchess continued nervously:

"I was in a great hurry to tell you but I did not see you—although" (plucking up a little courage) "every one came to compliment me on what had given me so much pleasure."

"I should have been mortified indeed," was the stately reply, "that Your Royal Highness should suppose me capable of joining my compliments to those of others on any such occasion: my real and respectful zeal for what personally concerns yourself can but afflict me in matters which I consider harmful. Moreover, I am additionally pained by the thought of Her Majesty's displeasure."

Instantly an expression of concern replaced the rather mischievous smiles on the childish face of Madame the Archduchess. She exclaimed frankly, and with real feeling:

"You would reduce me to despair by saying that I may pain the Empress—I own to you I am in the greatest anxiety."

What a pity no one was in a position to remind Maria Theresa of the old adage—*si on tire la corde trop fort, on la casse.* This time she mingled in her letter so much of those feelings which touched her daughter more than any severity that she leaves

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us only room for regret that all these restrictions were on the whole so unreasonable :—

Everyone continues very satisfied with you. What happy moments I owe to you, my dear child! Public approbation would not entirely satisfy me, although the Duc and Duchesse d'Arenberg cannot say enough, if I had not the testimony of Mercy. . . . You are right in thinking that I never could approve of your riding at fifteen; your aunts whom you quote did so at thirty. They were Mesdames, not the Dauphine: I owe them a grudge for egging you on by their example and approbation, but as you tell me the King approves and the Dauphin, all is said. . . . I placed that charming Antoinette in their hands. Riding spoils the complexion and your figure will suffer in the long run. I own that if you ride as a man, which I do not doubt, I think it quite dangerous. . . . If you ride as I did, on a side saddle, there is less to be said. Accidents cannot be foreseen: that of the Queen of Portugal and others is not reassuring. . . . One hour is long enough, and I saw in a private letter that you went out for two or three hours and several days running early in November. . . . What reason could I have to deprive you of what gives you pleasure unless I knew the consequences? Do me this justice that from the beginning I allowed my children all possible liberty and enjoyments—should I begin now to wish to deprive of any you who give me so much consolation? . . . I hold you to your word never to ride out hunting. . . .

Comte de Mercy-Argenteau maintained the dignity of his sovereign and country equally with a justly high appreciation of his own position. He hired and kept up the Petit Luxembourg before removing to the fine hotel which he had built on the Boulevard Richelieu, and which guide-books of 1786 mention as being among the sights of Paris. Moreover, he further fulfilled the eighteenth-century obligations of a man of fashion by expending large sums on Mademoiselle Rosalie Levasseur of the Opera, who was very clever and contrived in spite of "her little thread of a voice" to interpret the music of another admirer, Glück, to the entire

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satisfaction of that eminent composer. She was the daughter of a washerwoman of Paris, and was celebrated for the virulence and numbers of her disputes with Sophie Arnould, whose musical powers may or may not have exceeded her own. Impartial observers were of opinion that the palm of pre-eminence for command of language, more suggestive of inhabitants of the slums than votaries of music, could not justly be accorded to either singer.

Comte de Mercy's name has not been coupled with that of any other woman in the same way as those of Prince de Soubise, Chevalier de Durfort, and so many others of those among his compeers and contemporaries, who preferred the society of the *corps de ballet* to any members of the opposite sex in their own rank of life. Regarding that side of the ambassador's life there is every reason to suppose that in a congenial marriage, with a home and domestic ties, he would have found the precise form of happiness for which his character and principles eminently fitted him. But he betrayed little or no intention of gratifying those among his best friends who urged him to alter his mode of life, not even when the Empress worded some suggestions in the form of a personal favour to herself.

Perhaps the care of her daughter, complicated as it was by the Dauphine's connection with affairs of State and the immense difficulties in the way of his seeing her without either interruptions or inconvenient witnesses, was almost as onerous a charge as a family of his own could have been. He must have often reflected on the strange position into which he had been propelled by no single visible agency. It never seems to have occurred to any one, even Madame de Noailles, as a singular fact, that most of the details of the Dauphine's life were left to chance, unless a foreign ambassador took the

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burden on his own shoulders. The duties seem to have ranged from homilies on such delicate matters as her relations with Louis-Auguste down to the advantages of the use of a tooth-brush, and embraced every conceivable subject usually strictly reserved for the consideration of the family physician or an old nurse.

When Comte de Mercy made stately dissertations on the Archduchess's untidy manner of sitting in her chair, on the disorder of what he called her "habilliments," and the total absence of those minor amenities of the toilette that make just all the difference in the world, he betrayed no consciousness of any conviction that most of these deficiencies form an integral part of a young lady's education previously, not subsequently, to providing her with a husband. And, with his usual grave decorum he was able before long to report to the Empress-Queen that the controversy over the whalebone bodices had happily resulted in the adoption of those particular garments by the future Queen of France, not because she saw any necessity for making herself uncomfortable, but because she had been assured on the best authority that her mother desired her to do so.

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CHAPTER X

DISGRACE OF CHOISEUL

We left the Duc de Choiseul in an exceedingly critical position. An object of increasing if concealed irritation to the King, and of as much dislike as she was capable of feeling to the extraordinary favourite who had enchained the monarch's passing fancy, the Minister was probably far more conscious of the dangers he incurred almost daily than he chose to allow. He made little if any attempt to check the Duchesse de Gramont and Princesse de Beauvau, who vied with one another in abuse of Madame du Barry and her friends (especially Maréchale de Mirepoix, Prince de Beauvau's sister), and paid little attention when the King observed gloomily, "Choiseul, tell your sister to be more careful—otherwise I shall exile her."

Certain English writers are fond of asserting that the Franco-Austrian Alliance was more or less responsible for Choiseul's disgrace. It is not easy for the student of contemporary memoirs and letters to perceive whence this idea is derived, and Monsieur Maugras, the Duke's biographer *par excellence*, does not authorise any such suggestion. As a matter of fact the relations between Choiseul and the most prominent subjects of the Empress-Queen had been highly strained during his Embassy at Vienna, and a close study of their correspondence later on inclines the reader to the belief that

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had a less even-tempered envoy than Comte de Mercy occupied his post nothing could have averted an explosion. The friction between Choiseul and Prince Kaunitz was often acute. The fiery temper of the one, and the arrogance of the other, were not calculated to facilitate intercourse founded in both cases on an ardent adhesion to the interests of their respective countries. Comte de Mercy's patience, joined to his extreme tact, achieved what Princes Kaunitz and Starhemberg had failed to do. The last-named, on his return to France in attendance on the Dauphine, was greeted by the Choiseul coterie in a manner redolent of considerations of a political, rather than a friendly character. Whether with reason or no, Choiseul had been very dissatisfied with his experiences during the time he spent in Vienna. Towards its close he wrote to an intimate friend: "I have not passed a single day since I came here without anathematizing the momentary weakness that made me accept this Embassy." On his return to Paris, Prince Starhemberg, located there as ambassador, paid a *visite d'usage* and was actually kept waiting so long that he had to send in his name repeatedly before he was finally ushered into a reception-room. There he found the Duke all smiles and urbanity but with no hint of apology for his incivility.

"Monsieur le Duc," exclaimed the Prince with natural irritation, "you have kept me waiting a whole hour" ("vous me faites faire antichambre" is the stock untranslatable expression). "Is this intended as a studied insult, or were you really engaged?"

"I must confess," returned Choiseul in honied accents, "that I was looking out a word in a dictionary: but I was also desirous of conforming to Viennese customs. I have not forgotten that on

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a similar occasion Prince Kaunitz kept *me* waiting a whole hour."

Poor Prince Starhemberg, who had had nothing to do with the Chancellor's eccentricities, and who was himself the most civil and correct of people, was naturally deeply disgusted, and in his heart of hearts probably considered Louis XV.'s chief Minister a very absurd, not to say impertinent, person indeed.

Choiseul acted in a similar manner with regard to Madame du Barry, and his well-wishers had all the pains in the world to prevent his hurrying off to give a piece of his mind to one who would have deeply resented a repetition of opinions which he was determined to disregard. The next moment Choiseul was making all the jokes at the favourite's expense that only such a past-master in the art of raillery could have imagined.

"What is the matter?" inquired the King, when Madame du Barry was particularly put out.

"It is those nasty Choiseuls who have been spreading horrors about me."

"He is every instant on the point of falling by provoking Madame du Barry," wrote Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann at Florence long before, "forgetting that his predecessor, Cardinal de Bernis, was the sacrifice of his own insolence by insulting Madame de Pompadour."

And Madame du Deffand replied to further inquiries:—

"The grandpapa seems in a very good humour, but is not without misgivings, for the dame no longer conceals her hatred. . . . He daily receives little affronts, such as not being invited to the private suppers; and in her apartments when he is her *partenaire* at whist, grimaces, bad jokes, shrugging of shoulders—in short 'des petites vengeances de pensionnaire.'"

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But the rôle of a school-girl played by a du Barry supported as she was by the Chancellor Maupeou, with the "dévots," and reinforced by the Duc d'Aiguillon, who thought that at last he saw his way to power, recurringly included the use of edged tools.

The marriage of the heir to the Crown brought a temporary check to the plots so busily hatching to displace one of the most able Ministers who ever had the misfortune to serve an unworthy and ungrateful master.

When bankruptcy stared the Government in the face, Choiseul insisted in expending large sums on the subjection and acquisition of Corsica, a measure for which he was at the time generally blamed. He reaped only a posthumous reward, and gained immense credit among his countrymen of a later date, who consider that he ably checkmated England. Even had he possessed no other claim to distinction, he was the means of adding to the population of France the name of the mighty genius whose nationality would add lustre to any country. "You do not doubt of the restless ambition of Choiseul," wrote Mr. Walpole, who, if he was too deeply tinged with the views of *Société de Londres*, was generally singularly correct in his conclusions; "every step he takes marks that it is pointed against us. . . ." The Englishman had been rubbed the wrong way by the Duke, who, boasting about his policy with regard to the Turks and Russia, sent for a newspaper when Mr. Walpole was visiting the Hôtel de Choiseul and insisted on reading aloud a production dictated by himself. The Cabinet of St. James was not blind to the state of feeling, and when Parliament under Lord North met in November, 1769, the probability of war with Spain was freely discussed. Choiseul's motives for a long and

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patient reconstruction of the French Navy, and his persistent encouragement of the celebrated Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Grimaldi, in hostile demonstrations to England, were by no means unknown on this side of the Channel.

Acute irritation was aroused when the Governor of Buenos Ayres took forcible possession of one of the Falkland Islands, christened Port Egmont when England assumed possession in 1765. By the end of the following summer, Comte de Mercy perceived that the Duke was endeavouring to settle the problem of the advantages or disadvantages of a war with England, as these would personally affect himself and his term of office. France was bound by her engagements to support Spain in the event of hostilities breaking out between that country and our own. Prince Kaunitz, consumed with indignation at the mere suggestion, answered by return :—

I cannot conceal from you that I regard our Duke de Choiseul as either absolutely insane or very wicked if it is really his project to involve France in a fresh war, in spite of her acknowledged inability to engage in such except at total loss. It would be inconceivable on the part of any one else: knowing him, I can believe much. In any case I am not anxious, because we shall most certainly not allow ourselves to be drawn over the precipice.

The ambassador was full of admiration of a report sent by his chief :—

. . . this *chef-d'œuvre* of enlightened politics, based on truth, justice, and reason, as familiar to you as they are strangers to this country, where the behaviour is really pitiable and revolting to common sense. Monsieur de Choiseul, however, is beginning to see that without money, credit or generals, it is not advisable to make war. He now tries to get out of it, and to calm down, in Spain, the rhodomontades of which he himself set the example.

This was perhaps a lighter task than that of

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calming down heated utterances nearer home. Years before he had treated lightly a friendly warning anent Maupeou, whose ill-favoured countenance and green complexion inspired general mistrust. The Duc de Brissac called his face "à la bigarade" (many coloured), and some one else described his eyes as perpetually playing hide-and-seek with his nose. He owed his appointment to Choiseul, but had veered round to the opposing faction, complacently addressing Madame du Barry as "ma cousine." He appears to have hated every one all round, either openly or in secret, with great impartiality.

A friend once tried to warn the Minister:—

"Be careful of him. He is a *coquin*."

"I know he is a *coquin*," said the Duke cheerfully, "and if he misbehaves I shall turn him out."

But he reckoned without his host, or rather his King, and it was the speaker himself who had to leave.

I have read a great many works on Choiseul, and have weighed a vast number of opinions. There can be little doubt that but for the King's constitutional hatred of new faces, and his reluctance to cut short methods endeared to him by long habit of transacting State affairs, the Minister's *congé* would have been given earlier than it actually was.

A letter from "Spaa," as her secretary called a well-known little watering-place in the Ardennes, conveyed to the Empress at the end of August a rumour that Choiseul was to be disgraced and replaced by d'Aiguillon—with Comte de Broglie, whose proceedings in connection with the secret spy system she greatly disapproved, as head of the French army. This was with reference to the affair of the Parliaments, brought about indirectly by Aiguillon himself, and fomented in Choiseul's interests by the Duchesse de Gramont, who under pretext of drinking waters at Barèges had increased

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the King's irritation by conducting a political campaign of her own on a reduced scale. The Duc de Richelieu fell upon the Minister, who warmly defended his sister, and a violent dispute was the only ostensible result. More, however, was to follow.

Early on the morning of September 8, the inhabitants of Paris were awakened by the unwonted sound of guns firing a Royal salute. What could it be? The question was answered by the appearance of four companies of musketeers in scarlet—what would be called in this country a travelling escort of Life Guards—preceding the hunting carriages of the King. He entered the palace, and the magistrates were hurriedly summoned to hear a reprimand read out by the Chancellor, Maupeou, whose false and bad face, smothered in *rouge* and *blanc de perle*, indicated his pleasure in his enemy's discomfiture. But the Duke was not there to view the sorry spectacle; he was absent on a shooting expedition at Gennevilliers—wrapt in thoughts of Madame de Brionne, of whom, after knowing her intimately for twenty years, he had suddenly discovered himself to be desperately enamoured. It is said that his many well-wishers urged him to resign quietly and leave so ignoble an antagonist as du Barry in possession of the field. He showed no signs of any such intention, however, and the "cabal" had no alternative but to force the King's hand.

We have no space here for a detailed account of the intrigues of those last three months. The ostensible cause of the climax was the Minister's rather double project for war between England and Spain, with France at liberty to intervene. The real reason was Madame du Barry's enmity, coupled with the King's inability to forget the terms Choiseul had used about her past

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and his master's infatuation, two years before. Maupeou showed the King an undated letter written by Choiseul at the time of the expulsion of the Jesuits, and persuaded Louis XV. that this was one of many notes now being addressed to Parliament encouraging opposition to the King. They then induced him to interview the old *premier-commis* of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, an ex-Jesuit, of late years shorn of half his opportunities for intrigue by Choiseul's habit of writing all the confidential memoranda with his own hand. The Abbé de la Ville informed the King of a large number of projects of which he had been kept in ignorance, and further reassured him as to the effect of Choiseul's disgrace on the Courts of Vienna and Madrid. Sending for Choiseul the King ordered him to inform him how matters actually stood. The Minister, desiring nothing more keenly than an opportunity of regaining the colonial possessions lost to France by the Treaty of Paris, reiterated heated reminders of the obligations imposed by the "Pacte de Famille." "Sir," exclaimed the King angrily, "I have already told you that I will have no war." There was only one way out of the *impasse*, and that suited the King in more directions than one.

The same night a messenger left Paris for Madrid, bearing a private letter from his cousin to Charles III., demolishing any hopes of assistance the latter might have cherished, and urging him to make any possible sacrifice for the maintenance of peace. This communication, drafted by the Abbé de la Ville, was dated the *21st* of December and announced the disgrace of Choiseul on the *24th*. Similar instructions were sent to the French ambassador at Madrid from the Abbé, in conjunction with d'Ogny, Director of Posts, who was actively engaged in Louis XV.'s underground

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diplomacy. On Sunday the 23rd, it was noticed that instead of handing the pen back to the Secretary of State, after signing a document, the King flung it on the table, and later in the day said to the second Prince of the Blood:

"Prince de Condé, shall you be here to-morrow?"

"Yes, Sire;" and contrary to his custom he slept at Versailles.

Thus were Choiseul's great schemes defeated on the eve of execution; thus did a Jeanne Bécu affect the balance of power in Europe. Had war actually broken out, it seems not improbable that the Revolution might have been postponed for many years. When the news reached Vienna, the Empress expressed both fear and regret, largely on account of her daughter and the interests of the alliance, while Prince Kaunitz wrote:—

> I am sorry, but not surprised, my dear Comte. . . . This was the inevitable ending of all the imprudences that invariably, and especially during the last two years, we have seen him commit, both as Minister and courtier: in fact I should have been far more surprised had he remained for a longer period, than I am at his *chute*.

The King promenaded about Versailles for three days with his own instructions in his pocket, in order to prevent the exultant favourite despatching these prior to the preconcerted date of the disgrace.

At Versailles, at ten o'clock on a winter's morning, the stout Duc de la Vrillière, the "great *congédieur*" in ordinary,[1] might have been seen leaving the apartments of Madame du Barry, evidently intent upon no ordinary business. Emerging after a few moments from the rooms of Choiseul, de la Vrillière, "his little eyes sparkling maliciously," went on to the lodgings of the Minister

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, by Monsieur de Nolhac.

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of Marine (Praslin), equally involved in his cousin's disgrace. The orders thus conveyed were as cruel and barbarous as most of those of Louis le Bien-Aimé when he could be roused to take any action whatever—two hours to vacate Versailles; twenty-four to clear out of Paris; and exile to Chanteloup. The covering instruction ran as follows:—

The Duc de la Vrillière will convey the following orders to MM. de Choiseul, and will bring me their resignations. But for Madame de Choiseul I should have sent her husband elsewhere, on account of his property lying within the sphere of his own Government. But he will be practically non-existent, and will only see his family and those whom I am able to permit to go there.

Then, on a separate leaf:—

I command my cousin the Duc de Choiseul to hand the resignation of his charge as Secretary of State and Superintendent of Posts to the Duc de la Vrillière, and to retire to Chanteloup until a fresh order from me.[1] LOUIS.

AT VERSAILLES,
the 24th Dec., 1770.

The Minister of Marine met with a shorter shrift:—

I have no further occasion for your services, and you are exiled to Praslin, which you will reach within twenty-four hours. LOUIS.

Relating all this subsequently with great gusto, the Duc de la Vrillière said that Choiseul changed colour as he stammered obedience to his sovereign's will. No wonder if he turned pale: low as was his opinion of the King's character, it was hardly possible to foresee the extent of his ingratitude, or the nature of his methods for carrying out a

[1] Monsieur de la Rocheterie says that a number of historians have given different versions of this letter. The above was communicated to the *Revue de Paris* in 1829 by Gabriel, Duc de Choiseul.

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plan which, even if inevitable for reasons of State, would have seemed a painful necessity to any averagely constituted person.[1]

Louis XV. recalled with pleasure, if rather tardily, how heartily his late dear son had detested the able Minister, and said next morning to Madame de Marsan, sent for to his study on business connected with her pupils, Clothilde and Elisabeth, "Madame la Comtesse, are you *very* sorry not to find Monsieur de Choiseul here?"[2]

Either the secret was unusually well kept or the *chargé d'affaires* of Frederick the Great was enjoying a nap, for on the very day of these events at Versailles, the Sieur Sandoz-Rollin addressed a most exacting and irascible master as follows:—

> Never has greater tranquillity reigned here—and never has there been so little to report to Your Majesty.

Twenty-four hours later found him nervously composing long explanations of what he described as "a sudden and unexpected blow," running down a statesman who had been peculiarly obnoxious to his King. Comte de Mercy had no time just

[1] It is only right to say that while this account of Choiseul's fall has been carefully compiled from those of the best authorities, with a painstaking exclusion of numerous fables, there is another aspect of the question which can never be verified. One historian of the first calibre hints that Choiseul's personal inclination was against, not for, war. This is corroborated by the recently published memoirs of Colonel St. Paul, who was assured at the time on excellent authority that after his fall the Minister saw too late that by promoting hostilities he might have maintained himself in power. Proofs of this are, I believe, known to have been destroyed in the conflagration at the Hôtel de Ville by the Commune in 1771. The fact was that Choiseul was a many-sided genius, subject to the fluctuations of a mercurial temperament, and not overburdened by the peculiar form of consistency which is induced by a rigid adhesion to principles. Talleyrand, who did not like him, said he "had no heart, and talked too much"—defects from which English politicians in modern life are not wholly exempt.

[2] This is often cited in France as an example of Louis XV.'s spitefulness. As, however, every one knew that Madame de Marsan and her ally la Vauguyon were at daggers drawn with the Minister, the speech was evidently intended as a joke.

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then to spare for "this Prussian emissary," as he called him, for, within one hour of the news reaching the Austrian Embassy, he had drawn up, and sent off in hot haste to Vermond, some urgent instructions for Marie-Antoinette's guidance in delicate and critical circumstances. She acquitted herself so well of her part that the mentor was able to assure the Empress that not only all Versailles and Paris but even the members of the "cabal" had not failed to express admiration of her behaviour. This, however, did not prevent the aunts, who had hitherto supported Choiseul, turning round and abusing him until their niece eyed Madame Adelaide with open disapproval, and ended by taking up the cudgels in his defence—which was precisely what Comte de Mercy wanted to avoid.

The accounts given by the Duke's intimates, Baron Gleichen, Madame du Deffand, and others, quite fail to bear out the Duc de la Vrillière's spiteful description of the manner in which his quondam friend heard the cruel terms of his disgrace. These chroniclers, who, if partial, were at least better informed, say that the fallen Minister behaved throughout with that nonchalance which had distinguished him during his long political career. The Austrian ambassador, allied by many close ties of interests and pursuits with Choiseul—who, as it may be remembered, was not only by birth a Lorrainer but the son of a diplomat whose life had been spent in the Imperial service—corroborates the description of the dignity of both the Duke and Duchess in misfortune. The only member of the family who exhibited a lesser degree of self-control was the Duchesse de Gramont, who, having persistently irritated the King by the unmeasured criticisms she and her friend, Princesse de Beauvau, launched at certain orders of the Government, had

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further conducted a political campaign against the Chancellor by endeavouring to unite the Parliaments of Provence and Languedoc with those of Brittany and Paris. Now, when it was too late to retract, the Duchess, haughty and overbearing and ill-advised, realised that she had done incalculable harm to a brother she adored.

The owner of the new Hôtel in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière hurried through its dark, chilly rooms—up the great staircase, through vestibules and anterooms hung with the fine collection of pictures sold two years later for the then large sum of four hundred and twenty thousand livres[1]—along the gallery so lately filled with the gay crowds who formed his chosen society, to a huge salon which required nearly a hundred wax candles to light it up at all, and which was icy cold even with roaring fires in the gigantic Louis XV. grate and a stove at the other end. In a small room opening off—where Madame du Deffand sometimes supped with a few chosen friends when she felt unequal to joining those parties of fifty-five or more who filled the long gallery with noise and laughter—the little, Dresden-china-like figure of the Duchess was seated at dinner: two o'clock was the fashionable hour. She raised her beautiful eyes as her husband entered.

"You have all the appearance of an exiled man," she said quietly; "but sit down: our dinner will taste none the less good."

On the following morning the porter threw open the gates of the courtyard and a procession of travelling-carriages passed out on its way to Touraine, between a double line, reaching from the Hôtel de Choiseul to the Barrière d'Enfer, of sympathetic spectators waving and cheering so energetically that the once unpopular Minister

[1] Madame du Deffand to Hon. Horace Walpole.

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exclaimed, with tears in his eyes, "This is more than I have deserved."[1] And when the news reached the other side of the Channel, Lord Chatham, addressing a British Parliament, compared his ancient foe to Richelieu, adding that the modern prototype of the great Cardinal "carried with him into retirement the regrets of all classes of his countrymen."[2]

Readers of this history who take an interest in old-time customs may like to know how the upper classes travelled in France in the days before the Revolution swept away the customs and the upper classes too. Madame du Deffand has left a description of a visit she paid the following spring to her exiled relations, which alone justifies Horace Walpole's opinion of his blind friend's epistolary powers. Old and ill, quite unaccustomed to moves of any kind, escorted by the Bishop of Arras she journeyed very leisurely to Touraine in the month of May in a *berline*, the Bishop's carriage following with the servants and luggage, and of course the faithful secretary "Wiart" and possibly Rosette, predecessor of Tonton, the little dog who ended his days at Strawberry Hill. Leaving Paris at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon the travellers reached Étampes at eight: starting at eleven next morning they halted at Orléans between six and seven, the Bishop driving out four miles to visit a brother prelate at his country house. Sunday from one to eight brought them to Blois, only four hours from Chanteloup, which was reached at six o'clock on Monday evening.[3]

Every one talked of the enthusiastic crowds who did their best to cheer the departure of the Duke and Duchess, and we may be sure that the

[1] *Souvenirs du Baron v. Gleichen.*
[2] *Journals and Correspondence of Miss Berry*, vol. ii., p. 35.
[3] Madame du Deffand to Hon. Horace Walpole, May 21, 1772.

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King derived no pleasure from the narration. Nor did Chanteloup prove the exile he had intended it to be: for very shame Louis XV. could not withhold a grudging consent to the departure from Paris of a constant stream of visitors, who never ceased showering on the Choiseuls warm if rather expensive attentions.

Nothing now remains of the glories of Chanteloup, except the monument erected by the Duke to commemorate the names of the faithful friends who cheered his exile. The château, sold to pay his debts, was bought by the Duke de Penthièvre and pulled down fairly early in the nineteenth century. The Hôtel de Choiseul was swept away in the course of so-called improvements, and only one house remotely connected with Madame de Choiseul still remains. Her aunt had unhappily married a son of the Duc de Bouillon, noble in nothing but name and expenditure. Comte d'Evreux squandered the money of "the little Crozat," buying a large piece of land far out in the suburbs of what then constituted Paris and building a fine hôtel subsequently purchased by Madame de Pompadour. This is now the Palais de l'Elysée.

While momentous events were contributing towards the making of history, the future King and Queen were spending the most critical time of their lives in the trivial round of occupations of a most trivial existence. She was up at eight o'clock one morning to see the Comtes de Provence and Artois taking their lesson in the riding-school, in spite of an attack of indigestion—"due," says the ambassador conscientiously, "to having eaten too abundantly of a young pig on the previous evening." Italian pieces were played in the Palace theatre, and were the only "spectacles" enjoyed by Louis-Auguste, who detested music as much as his bride loved it and did not appreciate French comedies. But the

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Empress was by no means satisfied with such a manner of passing their time, and desired Marie-Antoinette to send her through the ambassador a monthly résumé of her readings. This request embarrassed the poor Dauphine very much: she did not mention it to Comte de Mercy but spoke of it at great length to the Abbé, who was desired by the former and Prince Starhemberg to prepare the journal of daily occupations in the Dauphine's rooms under her own eye. Vermond, however, declined; he thought this proceeding unwise, and added that if he wrote it in his leisure moments it would not fulfil its purpose of tying down the Dauphine to definite work. Comte de Mercy thought the objections reasonable:—

> . . . One cannot say that Her Royal Highness neglects these (duties): she has a facile and happy grasp of subjects, by means of which she takes hold of and retains what she reads, but she gives up too little time. The perpetual moves of the Court, and the consequent waste of time given to journeys, place invincible obstacles in the way of application: the winter will be more suitable.

For three years the admirable duet between Maria Theresa and the faithful Mercy perpetually returns to the dominant note—application, study, the improvement of the mind.

The cause of the disappearance of a portion of the correspondence is easily found. The Empress wrote to the ambassador:—

> I send you her letter, which you can burn, and do not appear to have seen it. I send it that you may see how greatly it is to be wished that she would apply herself to writing better, and especially to spelling.

Comte de Mercy replied:—

> The messenger arrived that evening and brought me the packets from Brussels, containing Y.M.'s very gracious letter of the 2nd, other letters from the Imperial Family to the

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Dauphine, and the despatches for the State Chancery. I proceeded at once to Court and found the Dauphine on the point of seating herself at table with the Dauphin. H.R.H. ordered me to enter and received with her customary joy and vivacity the letters with which I presented her. Although the dishes were on the table she told the Dauphin it was impossible to eat before reading Y.M.'s letter. So saying she dismissed me and entered her study.

Foreseeing that he would be summoned by the Dauphine next day, the ambassador proceeded to discuss with Vermond several points which the Abbé further amplified in a long memorandum destined for the Empress's perusal. The Abbé thought that there was not much hope for the writing, but that the spelling could be materially improved, to which object he should devote all his care. He gave an explanation of the former fault, which Mercy passed on to the Empress :—

He then enlightened me on one point; Madame the Dauphine never writes so badly as when she writes to Y.M., the reason being that she is convinced nothing of hers is safe. For this reason she writes just as the messenger is starting, and hurries so much that her letters are full of negligences caused by precipitation.

Comte de Mercy told the Abbé that they must try and reassure the Dauphine on a detail which he thought unfounded. He was quite wrong. He examined the "Service" "*d'assez près* and thought no one would open her bureau provided she will consent to wear the key." The Abbé on his side was evidently less certain that no one was capable of opening locked drawers :—

Madame la Dauphine fancies no paper is safe with her: she dreads double keys; she is afraid that hers may be removed from her pockets during the night. This fear, well founded or not, is real. She wished to re-read the last letter of H.M. the Empress, and felt able to keep it one night only by placing it in her bed. For this reason she

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writes only on the day her letters go: she is hurried, and hence her bad writing and spelling. . . .

The Abbé was "in a position to present himself every day after dinner," *i.e.* at about one o'clock. The interruptions were endless. When the Dauphin came, which, however, was not very often, he always entered unannounced. At other times a woman of the bedchamber or a page brought messages from "Mesdames." Vermond goes on:—

Your Ex. knows our Court—what tales would they not carry if they found me reading papers? The Princess spoke to me of her own accord five weeks ago, and I saw, on that occasion as on others, what an impression Her Maj.'s letters have made. It is no longer that childish fear I perceived at Vienna, but an excellent mixture of submission, respect, confidence, and desire to satisfy her august mother. Madame the Dauphine said to me:

"What am I to do? Mamma desires to have an account of my studies."

"You will certainly only say what is exact, Madame," and I seized the opportunity to point out where she had failed, to which she assented, but enumerated several difficulties. . . . Her age and character demand a certain constraint ("gêne") in all regular application: the obligation of writing about her studies would make her more precise and attentive: but *how* would she write? I can be of no assistance to her in this: I am hardly ever present when she writes. She sends for me sometimes as she is finishing, but is careful to keep me a very short time with unfinished papers. She says to me occasionally: "*They* would not fail to tell everybody that you dictate my letters." This is not imaginary: I could not risk writing before her and at her dictation—or even tell her what I had myself done elsewhere. The Dauphin finds me sometimes in the Dauphine's sitting-room.

Poor Vermond did not allude then to what pained him most, and outweighed all the annoyances and petty jealousies he endured more or less patiently. This was the strange behaviour of the

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Dauphin, who, until the Abbé had been for three and a half years in close attendance on Marie-Antoinette, never took the very smallest notice of him or, indeed, seemed even aware of his presence. This slight, important then to an extent we can barely imagine, was a fruitful source of spiteful discussion and rejoicing to a certain coterie, of which a long and laborious study of various sources of information leads me to think that Monsieur Campan was the active agent. A great deal more would have transpired on this point had any other memoirs analogous to those of his daughter-in-law seen the light. The devoted Madame Thibault, for example, the most trustworthy member of the Queen's service later on, who resisted every attempt to tamper with her fidelity or to extract her secrets, might have cleared up many mysteries and let in light on what will never now be known. She disapproved of Madame Campan, as much as the Abbé disapproved of that elderly butterfly *beau-père* on whose feet he trod perpetually with the clumsiness that lends additional discomfort to that unpleasant experience. Madame Campan comments gleefully in her book on the Abbé's humiliations, and demonstrates, perhaps rather more clearly than she herself intended, how Vermond informed Monsieur Campan that the Queen's private business must be transacted through himself alone. The last thing Monsieur Campan could forgive would be a blow to his vanity, and his pretensions aroused the displeasure of the Duc de Fronsac, with whose functions he was brought in contact, and who referred to him sarcastically as "my colleague Campan," a joke which has lost most of its point now that social distinctions practically exist no longer. The Dauphin's treatment was the principal reason alleged by Vermond for his resignation of his

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post three years later. Comte de Mercy found it more difficult to reply to this than to all the other causes for dissatisfaction. He owned to the Empress that he had "honestly taken it for granted that the Prince would speak and indeed had spoken when he became accustomed to seeing the Abbé nearly every day." The ambassador thought Louis-Auguste over-impressed by the Abbé's *esprit* and intimate knowledge of persons and circumstances, an opinion which Prince Auguste d'Arenberg (better known as Comte de la Marck) would not have endorsed. The latter declared that Marie-Antoinette had a very low opinion of Vermond's abilities, and only attended to his advice when he presented himself armed with the instructions of Comte de Mercy. The probabilities are that she doubted the value of the tutor's own opinion in a Court to which he was a stranger, and where he possessed no connections derived from birth or early training. Mercy never hesitated to give her all the information that would enable her to do the Abbé justice and appreciate his services at their true value :—

> The Abbé de Vermond has never attempted to form any *liaisons* at Court with any person whatever, even among those attached to the Dauphine's service. Never has he placed a foot in the house of a Minister of State ("ministre du Roi") in spite of the advances that have been made. When he is not in the ante-chambers or apartments of the Dauphine he is at home, in complete isolation : an existence so widely different from that of all the intriguers of this Court must cause displeasure, and the latter can but regard this Abbé as an obstacle to their designs on the Dauphine. If, in the behaviour of this Princess any subject for criticism arises, they hasten to throw the blame on the Abbé and myself, on account of our being alone in her confidence.

He adds sapiently that increased attention to these joint recommendations and warnings would

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compensate both mentors for what they had to put up with, and would further calm the Empress :—

> The Dauphine seemed greatly struck by this last reflection, mentioning, with her ordinary good faith, some small errors in the past. . . . H.R.H. added with charming ingenuousness: "I will make as few mistakes as I can: when these occur I will always own to them."

In October, 1773, when Vermond presented himself at the ceremony of the public dinner in company with the Empress's confidential secretary, Baron Neny, then on a short visit to France, the Dauphin managed to utter a few commonplace remarks, in which he included the Abbé. This, said Comte de Mercy, "calmed his doubts and fears"; but the tutor appeared less "penetrated" by the Dauphin's tardy condescension, due to two energetic remonstrances from Marie-Antoinette, than by the Empress's solicitude for his welfare. Once he broke down altogether at Compiègne, in the summer of 1771, and said he should "never in his life forget the Dauphine's kindness to him or the feeling she showed" on that occasion. All that even she could extract on the following day from Louis-Auguste was that "he saw no harm in the Abbé staying on"! The witty Sardinian ambassador, Marchese Caraccioli, arriving from London to take up his duties at the French Court, could not contain his amazement at the aspect of the heir to the throne—"selvaggio e rozzo, a segno che sembra nato ed educato en un bosco," which meant to imply that the Dauphin looked and behaved like a wild man of the woods. He was not much use in influencing his bride to improve her mind.

We now return to Vermond's memorandum :—

> If Madame the Dauphine reports on her reading, she would fear her papers being seen. The Dauphin would certainly not encourage any useful writing. I believe

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Mesdames her aunts would not try to put her off, but would she not blush if, in their eyes, she had the appearance of being educated? At fifteen her reason is not yet invulnerable as regards certain jests. The King never reprimanded or advised Mesdames, even in their childhood: they were given false ideas on the education of the Archduchesses. The first month the Dauphine spent in France Mesdames often spoke to her of her education and their own, letting her see how convinced they were that that of the Archduchesses had been very severe. These remarks are fortunately ended, but might they not recommence and would not the Dauphine dread their return? . . . I have reflected long on the mode of rendering an account of the reading. . . . Her Maj. might ask the Dauphine to send her a few separate sheets: these could be given to me and sent with the letters. I think it would be wiser for H.M. not to ask for a more extensive account: the Dauphine would find it impossible because of the fear of being surprised by the Dauphin: one is forced to consider places and circumstances. Y. Ex. knows the misfortune of our princes and princesses: their education finished, they know neither occupation or advice: everyone tries to dominate—rarely to enlighten or direct. Five months of experience and of constant attention persuades me that this example will harm the Dauphine on no essential point. Her deep respect for the Empress and her excellent character guarantee this. Up to now, she has committed no essential fault: Your Ex. knows from herself how she attends and makes up for her little failings. Every day I admire her gentleness, and, I may add, her docility. She permits me to tell her truths respectfully before her lady of honour and the persons of her chamber when I am in her study: truths more firmly and strongly worded than at Vienna. I know that I owe her confidence to the suffrages of H.M. the Empress, but is it not surprising that this should continue, and that the Dauphine should have the courage to put up with an importunate mentor, in the very midst of homage and adulation?[1]

The household appears to have been singularly ill-managed, especially that portion of it which came into the department of the "dame d'atours," a post analogous to that of a Mistress of the Robes in

[1] Abbé de Vermond to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, October 20, 1770.

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days when that function was not merely nominal.[1] The public part, the "service of honour" (ladies-in-waiting, etc.), was under Madame de Noailles; but her sister-in-law, Madame de Villars, was responsible for the "interior service" (women of the bedchamber, etc.), which included every one and everything connected with the toilet, down to the lowest wardrobe-keeper, whose only duty seems to have been to hang innumerable dresses in endless cupboards. The Duchesse de Villars, old and ill, was long past the functions she had discharged thirty years before to the satisfaction of Queen Marie. Comte de Mercy did not hesitate to throw the blame on the "dame d'atours" for the want of care that was taken to show the Dauphine at her best: "It is true that H.R.H. is not advantageously dressed, but the fault is solely due to her *dame d'atours*, who knows very little about it (dress) and gives the matter only a medium amount of attention." One would have supposed that Madame de Noailles might have done something indirectly, especially as the lady in question was her sister-in-law, Amabel-Gabrielle de Noailles, married to Henri, Duc de Villars, living in an old hôtel in the Rue de Grenelle, where she died in September, 1771. But she did not resign her post, and the applications for it were as endless as the intrigues to which they gave rise. Not to break off the recital of this curious "bedchamber plot" in the middle, we will return for a moment to the Duc de la Vauguyon, who had not abandoned his project of placing his daughter-in-law in a post "so *intime*," said Comte de Mercy, "that it was very

[1] In the first edition, published in English about 1823, of Madame Campan's reminiscences, *dame d'atours* was for some mysterious reason translated "tirewoman"—a ridiculous error, often repeated since. A tirewoman was the precursor of the modern lady's-maid, who in royal households and in stage dressing-rooms, and apparently nowhere else, was and is still called "a dresser."

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important it should be filled by some one the Dauphine liked personally" — a detail which apparently never entered any one else's head. Hearing accidentally that the succession of the place was about to be given away, the Dauphine fell into a state of profound agitation and sent for Vermond, who at once recommended consulting Comte de Mercy. The Archduchess replied that there was not a moment to lose, and bade Vermond help her concoct a letter to the King, who was at La Muette. In vain he represented how much wiser it would be to speak to one who was always more amenable than when written to. In spite of the Abbé's expostulations the following note was drafted, and sent with some foolish and unnecessary alterations made by "Mesdames," who as usual made bad worse :—

I hear that Madame de Villars thinks of asking Y.M. to bestow the succession of her place on Madame de St. Mégrin. I am so occupied with this that I cannot wait for the moment when I expect the happiness of seeing you. I should be very pained to see Madame de St. Mégrin in my household, and specially in such a place. I have too much confidence in the affection of my dear papa to believe he would give me this *chagrin*.

The same day the answer came back :—

I have not been addressed on the subject of Madame de St. Mégrin: I recollect that my late son promised her a place in the household of his daughter-in-law,[1] but things have much changed since then, and you have had the Queen's household. When places fall vacant through death or resignations, I hope you will accept the persons I propose to you. I am not surprised that Madame de St. Mégrin does not suit you—she is too young, and far too stupid.

(The last four words were scratched out, but could be read through the erasures by those who saw the letter.)

[1] Marie-Josèphe de Saxe.

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One might suppose that this would have been enough for the Duc de la Vauguyon. Not in the least; for he now attacked the Dauphin, saying that he himself had got a promise in writing. Marie-Antoinette indignantly requested Louis-Auguste to explain why he had written to the Duc d'Aiguillon in support of the application, when the Prince replied that he took no interest whatever in his late tutor or his affairs, but had done what he could to deliver himself of his importunity. The King, compromised by Aiguillon, who probably saw an opportunity of vexing the poor Dauphine, sent for Comte de Mercy to ask him to adjust the matter. The latter at once said that no compromise was possible; that the promise to the Dauphine was clear and distinct; the Duchesse de St. Mégrin was too young; that it would be too hard to bestow such a place on one for whom the Dauphine showed aversion, and so on.

As Comte de Mercy well knew, Madame du Barry was playing an active if concealed part in all this, and adding greatly to the King's indecision. The Dauphin possibly did not own to Marie-Antoinette that he had written to the King at the same time as she did so, impelled by a reminder of a promise made, or endorsed, by his mother, whose memory was always dear to him. "My dear son," wrote his grandfather, "with the repugnance you know that Madame the Dauphine feels and that is personal to Madame de St. Mégrin, would you give her this pain?" adding that his dear daughter is herself very young to make such a choice.[1]

These great ladies seem to have had very perfunctory notions of defending the Dauphine from imbroglios in which her name should never have been mixed up, or from the depredations and indiscretions of the *sous-service*. Madame de

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine*, by Monsieur de Nolhac.

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Noailles's assertion to Comte de Mercy, that she had no authority over various abuses connected with the interior arrangements, referred to the separate department of the "dame d'atours," occupied as we have already seen by the Duchesse de Villars, who neither attended to her duties nor relegated them to any one else. No one seemed to contemplate saving the Dauphine from the encroachments of Madame de Misery, who used the influence given her by her children's attractions to introduce a number of dangerous innovations. Great discontent was excited among the subordinate members of the household by the repeated requests of a Mademoiselle de Marolles, whose annoyance at a sudden diminution of the favours she had extorted, took the form, to the great astonishment and disgust of her colleagues, of taxing the young princess with a want of liberality.

Dining one night with the Comptroller-General, Comte de Mercy was entreated to use his influence with the Dauphine to get her to restrict her commands to really deserving cases. On his demanding an explanation and expressing surprise at the request, a paper was produced—said to be one of very many—couched in the following terms and in the well-known childish hand :—

> I urgently beg to call the attention of Monsieur the Comptroller-General to the accompanying memoir, and desire that he will carry out its object.

This was nothing more nor less than a demand of sixteen thousand livres by an under-woman of the bedchamber, for no better reason than that she was going to be married and was not possessed of the wherewithal with which to carry out that laudable project. Far from having made any sensible objections on the occasion, the petition had been presented to the Dauphine through no less a

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person than Comtesse de Noailles, who had strongly endorsed its recommendation; and Comte de Mercy suspected that neither she nor the Archduchess knew anything about the case or even the extent of the "exorbitant" sum named. There is a certain amount of circumstantial evidence pointing to the petitioner being one of the family of a Monsieur Genet, a *sous-commis* in the Bureau des Affaires Étrangères in Paris, the eldest of whom was employed on scanty pay in an office from which, on embracing revolutionary principles, he emerged as Minister from the Convention to St. Petersburg. About 1771 his sister, Henriette, exchanged her work as "Reader" to Mesdames for a subordinate place in the Dauphine's household, whence she was shortly after married to the son of Monsieur Campan, one of the Gentlemen-Ushers to the late Queen. It is only just to Madame Campan to recall that she invariably speaks highly of Madame de Noailles, while relating one or two trifling anecdotes about her fondness for ceremonial. It is more than likely that she was always worrying Marie-Antoinette about what the late Queen had said and done, eliciting at length the impatient if very natural rejoinder:

"All that is very suitable for the daughter of a King of Poland married to a King of France, but would be quite unnecessary in the case of an Archduchess."

Had Madame de Noailles paid the same attention to certain monetary abuses dating from the late Queen's day, she would have been highly praiseworthy. The treasurer Pomeri, as Comte de Mercy called Randon de Pomery, received monthly on behalf of the Dauphine six thousand francs from the Treasury, from which, without reference to anybody, he deducted nearly half to pay pensions granted by the late Queen. The grooms-of-the-chamber received a hundred louis a month for the

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expenses of card and similar games, but whether Marie-Antoinette lost or won, the money was never seen again, for the women-of-the-bedchamber seized on the rest or distributed it after suggestions by the Comtesse de Noailles, for which, said Comte de Mercy indignantly,

she extorted the consent of the Dauphine . . . Happily she (the latter) is very little inclined to expenses and *fantaisies*: the little money she gives of her own initiative is in charity and is judiciously administered: I am positive that it will always be with discernment and restraint that H.R.H. will make inroads on the thousand louis that Y. Maj. ordered me through the medium of Prince Starhemberg to advance as required by the Dauphine.

All the same she was very fond of giving presents, which she paid for out of her own money; a magnificent bureau for the Empress, ordered as a great secret,[1] proved an object of admiration to Prince Kaunitz (a noted connoisseur), and the recipient wrote, "I should be curious to know what it cost." Marie-Antoinette was constantly endeavouring to send little souvenirs to her old friends in Vienna, but if she entertained any lingering hopes of making a personal acquaintance with the glories of the Paris shops—the supreme object of so many young people's wishes—these were speedily frustrated by the ambassador, who chose "*bijoux* and small objects" himself, and sent these to Versailles by the Abbé for the Dauphine's selection. "Mesdames" made occasional excursions to what Mercy called "boutiques," but without, as he was careful to add, exciting a small part of the atten-

[1] Why, in face of the Dauphine's explicit instructions, Comte de Mercy should have hastened to inform the Empress that this very innocent "surprise" was being prepared for her, it is not easy to understand. One commentator says "the treacherous Mercy," which is putting it a little strongly, for of course rigid etiquette necessitated obtaining a previous notification of the willingness of the Empress to receive any present—even from her own child.

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tions that greeted any appearance of the Archduchess. One cannot help feeling for the princesses, whose lives were not bright, useful, or happy, but who might undoubtedly have made a greater success of those narrow existences had they been more sensible and high-minded.

Long-standing abuses were revealed by an inquiry into the management of the finances ostensibly set apart for the household of the Dauphine. Comte de Mercy begged her to consent to establish some order and method, and to ask for an account of the expenditure. If the treasurer was not guilty of worse than negligence, it is hard to comprehend why Comtesse de Noailles or some one else did not initiate an inquiry. Some perfunctory questions produced a sum of seven thousand francs, left over from one department, which at the request of its legitimate owner was distributed among the "secondary service who, in default of being paid their wages, are in a state of misery and embarrassment that is common to all those composing the domestic service of this Court."

Early in the following year, when the Duchesse de Cossé entered on her functions she was actually alarmed at the excessive expenditure in the department of the *dame d'atours*, a great deal of which she seemed to attribute to the fancies and the caprices of the Dauphine. Here the equitably-minded Mercy stepped in, and insisted that justice should be done to his Archduchess, who, as no one knew better than he, was too often made the scapegoat for the depredations of those who from every point of view should have known better. It cannot have been easy to take action. It was an open secret that the personal expenses of the Dauphin were in a similar or worse condition, and that the sums allotted to the household of the Comte de Provence had increased out of all reason,

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chiefly because the Duc de la Vauguyon's innumerable high-sounding names and titles did not stand in the way of his enriching himself by selling places near the princes' persons to the most unsuitable if the highest bidder. The sum of 120,000 livres assigned annually to the department of the Mistress of the Robes had represented in eighteen months a nominal total of 350,000 and some odd thousand francs, the only authorisation for which were the written orders of the Duchesse de Villars, who had followed the example of her predecessors and produced an annual account "auquel on ne peut rien comprendre," but which was nevertheless approved and signed by the Dauphine, who knew less about it than anybody concerned. It seems strange, now that we connect Marie-Antoinette with all that is most gorgeous in dress and personal adornment—now that we know that her taste in all such matters as interior and exterior decorations was of the highest order—to realise that at this time of her life she never asked for a single dress or chose anything she put on. All this was arranged by the Duchesse de Villars, who had no aptitude or inclination for her duties and whose

age and infirmities had so broken her down that enormous pillage had been introduced into her department. . . . I found means of proving that H.R.H., who had never chosen or asked for one dress or adjustment and who placed herself entirely in the hands of her "dame d'atours," had taken no part in these bad economies.

When the accounts were examined crying depredations were effectually disclosed: I will cite those that struck me by their absurdity. . . . The Bedchamber Women sent in bills for four pairs of shoes a week: three yards of ribbon daily to tie the *peignoir* of the Dauphine: two yards of taffeta every day to cover the basket in which the fan and gloves were carried. An infinity of similar details existed with regard to other articles. I represented to the Arch-

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duchess that she should not allow such means to be employed to cover robbery: I got her to promise to make, in concert with her Mistress of the Robes, a plan by which all the abuses will be reformed, and I am now satisfied that the 120,000 livres will amply suffice for the upkeep of the Wardrobe.

The treasurer, Pomery, was probably not entirely satisfied with these reforms. He insisted on the custom that payments should only pass through his hands, with the result that Comte de Mercy much doubted whether the 7000 francs had done the right people much good, and begged the Archduchess to attend to the matter herself in future. She would not do as he suggested about the pensions, and through "bonté" and "facilité" could not be induced to alter existing arrangements. No one seemed very certain about the recipients of the 20,000 livres of ancient pensions, or why these were charged to the Dauphine's accounts when it was certain that Queen Marie Leszczynska had left by her will sufficient private property of her own to discharge such obligations.

About the middle of September, 1771, when the condition of the Duchesse de Villars became critical, applicants for her post waxed clamorous and assertive. Having, as we have seen, succeeded in getting rid of Madame de St. Mégrin, the Dauphine was exceedingly nervous on the score of Mesdames de Valentinois, de Montmorency and de Laval—all adherents of Madame du Barry. She was the recipient of an attention (by which, Vermond wrote, she had been much touched) on the part of the lady-of-honour of Comtesse de Provence, who was afterwards exceedingly badly treated by the prince, and was requested to resign her charge for no other reason than saying straight out about Madame du Barry what less sincere and courageous people only thought. The Duchesse

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de Brancas sent a letter marked "immediate" to ask Madame de Noailles to warn the Dauphine that the latter's pet bugbear (the Comtesse de Valentinois) had ordered special messengers to follow her the moment the Duchesse de Villars was *in extremis*, adding, "in case this information might prove useful."

On arriving at Versailles that morning Vermond mounted the huge marble staircase to the Dauphine's apartments, and found the young lady "fort agitée," having just said to the King:

"Papa, I hope you will give me one of my ladies?"

"Certainly not; and I rely on your receiving my choice with respect."

Her perturbation was relieved on the King informing her that he had chosen the daughter of the Duc de Nivernais; that he knew her slightly, but had heard only good of her—adding praises of his quondam friend her father, to the surprise of the Dauphine, who like many very young persons had an inconvenient memory, and recollected the King's bitterness about the Duke at the moment of the disturbances with the Parliaments. Vermond wished he could cure her of saying continually—"so and so was *against the King*." Louis XV. added that the Dauphine was at liberty to signify his Royal will and pleasure to the Duchesse de Cossé, he himself having informed no one. When Marie-Antoinette wrote, it was only to discover that the Duc d'Aiguillon had rushed to Paris with the news, which was now known to fifty people at least. She went straight to the King and complained of "the ridiculous position she was placed in by the indiscretion of his confidants," which must have given her some satisfaction, especially as the King for once could not take refuge in silence, received his incensed

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grand-daughter-in-law well, and said he was "very sorry."

Madame de Noailles doubted whether the post would be accepted by a lady who made no secret of disliking Courts, and who had kept away for two whole years. But the Duchesse de Cossé was provided with a husband who found Courts that included such people as du Barry greatly to his liking, and he gave his wife no peace until she accepted an offer which she owed to the favourite. She visited du Barry once on arriving at Versailles to take up her duties, and declined to meet her under any circumstances afterwards. Vermond said that the Dauphine had paid a visit of condolence to her lady-of-honour on the death of her sister-in-law, and that Madame de Noailles had returned to pay her respects "in secret" (apparently on account of mourning) to the Dauphine, who had been very affectionate and kind with her. The Abbé thought the Comtesse attributed some of these attentions to his influence, for she observed to the Archduchess: "Madame, you must keep this Abbé: much good was said of him to the King a few days ago by the Bishop of Rheims."

It is the duty of the conscientious historian to record that before very long the Dauphine showed a marked predilection for Madame de Cossé—"they say she is much the most amiable," wrote the Empress—which gave great umbrage to Madame de Noailles and produced a fresh quantity of *tracasseries*.

Adelaide Diane Hortense Délie Mancini de Nevers, affectionately known by her own friends as "Mancinetta," had been married for about eleven years to the Duc de Cossé, eldest son of the old Maréchal de Brissac. She was exceedingly popular, and her reputation commanded general respect. Monsieur Geffroy says she "was a charming

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exception in the centre of intrigue that surrounded Marie-Antoinette," and Count Creutz, sketching the suite of the Dauphine for his Sovereign's information, wrote to Gustavus III.: "Madame de Cossé is loved and respected for her virtues and her mental qualities. She takes sides with no party: and only desires that her mistress should be adored by everybody." The Duchess was the daughter of a father who was described in Lord Chesterfield's letters as "the model of an accomplished gentleman," Louis de Mancini Mazarin, Duc de Nivernais, a great-nephew of the Cardinal, and half Italian through his mother, who belonged to the great Genoese Spinoza family. He was a member of the Academy, and is best remembered by his poetry and fables.

Thus incongruously was effected one of the rarely valuable appointments to that enormous household, and through the medium of almost hostile influences Marie-Antoinette was provided with one of the few loyal and efficient friends she ever found in France.

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CHAPTER XI

COMTESSE D'EGMONT

THE year 1771 opened gloomily enough.

The imposing façade of the Hôtel de Choiseul presented the depressing spectacle of rows of closed and darkened windows — the great gates, the *porte-cochère*, remained shut and barred. Occasionally, a small side door opened to allow a servant to pass in or out, affording glimpses of the courtyard, where the only signs of life were pigeons strutting about in the pale wintry sunshine and a thin column of smoke curling upwards from the lodge of the Suisse in the corner. That functionary — when he emerged from his lair and sauntered up and down outside, or leaning against the stone pillars that faced the street exchanged remarks with the passers-by—was not easily recognisable in his rather untidy *déshabillé* for the gorgeous figure in gold-laced coat and three-cornered hat who had so lately presented the book of Madame la Duchesse for the inscription of visitors' names.

Maupeou had once declined to transfer himself and his family to a new residence in Paris on the ground that from his windows he commanded a full view of the chimneys of the Hôtel de Choiseul. He had done with Choiseul, and was now occupied in hatching plots against Aiguillon, who soon declared himself his most formidable rival.

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Storm-clouds were gathering thick and fast, and the King had dropped the pilot. A hail of seditious placards again descended on the capital, necessitating the utmost vigilance on the part of the police, who were kept hard at the work of suppression. An example was obtained with considerable difficulty and sent to Prince Kaunitz, who, in Vienna, was anxiously watching the effect of his old friend's fall. The style of writing proved these treasonable publications to be "a production of the people—all the more dangerous," as Comte de Mercy observed. In England Ministers past or future would have been concentrating their energies in fighting hotly-contested elections all over the country and in proclaiming their principles and propaganda as loudly as possible from the hustings or polling-booth. Even in those old days of bribery and corruption—how hard it is in our present state of perfection to realise that they ever existed!—the offer of a gold collar for the Duchess of Kendal's dog or the arrangement of a particularly recherché dinner to meet the Papal Nuncio and other select guests in honour of a *fille du monde*, would not necessarily have been the most effectual means of ensuring the appointment of an unlikely candidate as Prime Minister, or had the further effect of keeping him in office for a dozen years or longer. In the days of the old *régime* such places were filled by no volition of talent or popularity on the part of an aspirant, still less through the voice of that people for whose welfare he was mainly responsible. Attainment to power was generally reached by currying favour with some unworthy woman. Madame de Pompadour, of whom it has been aptly said that she was worth more than her reputation or the place she filled, was primarily responsible for the rise of Choiseul to heights of which he once perhaps hardly dared

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to dream. Aiguillon, great-nephew and most unworthy successor of Cardinal de Richelieu, owed his start in life to Madame de Châteauroux, and was now busily engaged in showing Madame du Barry the class of gratitude so often described as a lively sense of favours to come. He was shrewd enough to perceive that to try and overcome the King's personal distaste was wasted time. Eighteen months before, in one of those moments of impulse so inconceivable to colder, more evenly-balanced natures, Choiseul had asked "le Maître" point-blank whether his own enforced resignation and the name of his successor were accomplished facts? To these pertinent queries the following singular reply was returned in original :—

I begin with Monsieur d'Aiguillon. How can you imagine that he could replace you? I like him well enough, it is true, on account of the trick I played him very long ago.[1] Hated as he is, what could he possibly do?

Prince Kaunitz took a strong view of the situation :—

It is indeed frightful to see dominions governed as France is to-day. I own to you I should go as far as my legs would carry me if it were so with us. . . . I cannot hide from you that I consider the King would do well not to delay ("de ne pas lambiner") giving himself a Minister for the Foreign Affairs. Any choice would be preferable to the existing condition of anarchy. One would know at least what to hope for the future and would arrange accordingly, whereas with people who are here to-day and gone to-morrow, ignorance of their claims to confidence or the reverse, gives an air of dissimulation to those who are only prudent.[2]

By return Comte de Mercy lamented the

[1] This refers to an *affaire-de-cœur* between the Duc d'Agenois (Aiguillon) and Madame de la Tournelle, subsequently created Duchesse de Châteauroux, which was nipped in the bud by the King.

[2] Prince Kaunitz to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, March 2, 1771.

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"extreme incompetency" of the Duc de la Vrillière,

who knows neither how to speak or listen, and whose memory is so bad that he cannot report the smallest affair at the Council without a written précis before his eyes.

In such a condition of things it is impossible to touch here on political matters, and to sum up the situation, France is actually without justice, ministry, or money. It would be impossible to estimate the duration of this crisis: if it lasts a little longer the Monarchy will long feel its effects. The choice of Ministers appears to turn on Monsieur d'Aiguillon or Comte de Broglie, but on this point conjectures are still doubtful; the King is entirely governed by his natural weakness, by intrigues and by reluctance to dissatisfy either the entire nation or the reigning cabal.

Comte de Mercy regretted the Duc de Choiseul less on personal grounds than on account of the dangers attending the choice of a successor, and was chiefly occupied with the attitude of those in the running towards the Alliance:—

Monsieur de Vergennes is credited with limited talents,[1] but I think advantages can be derived from his sentiments on the existing system as well as from his calm sense: Monsieur de Chauvelin, with a rather showy exterior, has also given evidences of incapacity, but it might not be difficult to turn and keep him in the right direction: the fiery head ("tête fougueuse"),[2] the prejudices and suspicious nature of Comte de Broglie would cause more embarrassment; the suspected opinions of the Abbé de la Ville, etc., etc. As to the Duc d'Aiguillon, he is unknown in political affairs but well known in all that characterizes a man who is insidious, bad and dangerous in all respects. . . . I am quite unable to give you as exact and striking an account as I could wish of the general disorder that reigns here . . . this reduces all business to chance . . . the result being that I can only claim the merit of a newspaper for my despatches. . . .

[1] Monsieur de Vergennes proved an exceedingly able Foreign Minister under Louis XVI.

[2] Comte de Mercy called Choiseul's a "tête bouillante."

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In April Comtesse d'Egmont wrote to the King of Sweden :—

> Here we are still in the same state of uncertainty. . . . In spite of the wishes of Monsieur de Scheffer it seems likely that Monsieur d'Aiguillon will fail to get the appointment. The Chancellor weekly announces his new Parliament, and daily everyone refuses (to join). Four first Presidents, successively nominated, got out of it after raising certain hopes. The Chancellor turns his attention to women—to which we reply modestly that at Rome it was the geese who saved the Capitol.

The writer was not the least prominent member of a remarkable quartette composed of the Duchesse de Gramont, her inseparable companion, Princess de Beauvau, Madame de Mesmes, and herself—she being the cleverest of them all, judging by her letters and the political memoranda preserved to this day in the Archives at Upsala in two packets labelled "Lettres de Brene."

Why is it, one often wonders, that the charm of certain people survives long after they themselves have been swept away by the remorseless hand of time? The brilliant figures that moved about in the last years of the old *régime*, all unconscious of the abyss widening beneath their feet, have a certain attraction for most of us—for none more than the compiler of these laborious records; but some personalities stand out from the rest. Few indeed in her own day were impervious to the mysterious fascination of the woman with whom Horace Walpole professed himself ready to fall in love at first sight, that charmer of the most fastidious, that breaker of many hearts, whose influence over Gustavus of Sweden was so potent while it lasted — Sophie-Jeanne-Armande-Elisabeth-Séptemanie de Vignerod du Plessis de Richelieu. She was one of the two children of the wicked old Maréchal Duc de Richelieu

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and the highly-born and short-lived Elisabeth de Lorraine, the only one of his three wives who had fixed his worthless affections. Their daughter was engaged very young and married within ten days to the foremost *parti* in the Netherlands, with half-a-dozen titles superadded in Italy, France and Spain—a widower of twenty-nine, stiff, cold in manner and pedantic in speech. The second wife of Casimir Pignatelli, Comte d'Egmont, Prince de Clèves, Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece and a Spanish Grandee of the first class, made her first appearance in the *grand monde* at the age of ten :—

VERSAILLES: 18 *Aug.* 1750.—Monsieur de Fronsac and Mademoiselle de Richelieu, appeared yesterday *chez* Madame the Dauphine . . . He is fourteen, much smaller than his sister and very delicate: she is a good figure and extremely pretty, and appears to be strong.

Thus the good Duc de Luynes. At sixteen Mademoiselle de Richelieu was apparently indifferent to the disposal of her fate, although an eye-witness said that "she went through the wedding ceremonies as though she were more dead than alive." She had already outlived romance, for her father absolutely refused to allow her to marry the handsome and chivalrous Louis, Comte de Gisors, eldest son of Maréchal de Belle-Isle, a descendant of Fouqué.

The Hôtel d'Egmont, Rue Louis le Grand, was a frequent meeting-place for the members of a society that revolved round a young woman described by Mr. Walpole as "delightfully gay and conversable and pretty." Here in the decorous *salle-à-manger à la flamande* (says Comtesse d'Armaillé) with its ancient portraits and heraldic decorations, the most spiteful woman in France witnessed a curious scene. Madame de Silléry

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(Genlis), a young bride, had accompanied her aunt Madame de Montesson (afterwards morganatic wife of the Duc d'Orléans) to a large supper-party. Monsieur de Lusignan, nicknamed "the big head" and famous for his want of tact, fixed his eyes on a life-size picture opposite, representing a young and beautiful woman gazing abstractedly before her. Comte d'Egmont, replying to his guest's enquiries, said that this melancholy portrait represented an ancestress of his own whose husband had considered himself justified in cutting off her head.

"Good Heavens," exclaimed Monsieur de Lusignan, looking at his hostess, "does not that picture alarm you very much?" Then, receiving no reply, he blundered on: "But thank goodness, the Egmonts are no longer so ferocious."

Comtesse d'Egmont laughed in a rather forced manner, and some one hurriedly changed the conversation. Soon afterwards, however, the young bride who had been present was treated with extreme coldness by the Comtesse, who, finding that the story had been circulated by one of her guests, said (with what truth she little knew) that in spite of her gentle, shy appearance Madame de Silléry must be very malicious. That ingenuous young person contrived, with an astonishing deftness revealed in her account, to throw the blame on her aunt, who consequently was never after on more than bare speaking terms with Comtesse d'Egmont.

With the latter's moral character we have nothing to do here. She has been bitterly assailed. Her father's evil celebrity or the hatred felt for her by the supporters of Madame du Barry, against whom she waged formidable war, may have reacted on her reputation. It is impossible to say and unprofitable to consider. She was pretty, fascinating, much discussed, copied,

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even laughed at—but always admired and not a little envied. Those who knew her best said she was difficult to describe. Tall and slight, she had a very small head and features; her black eyebrows actually met over dark eyes "like velvet, with strange golden lights." She belonged to a day that is gone, and she represents the type of great lady that was swept away by the Revolution. She had at any rate the brains to appreciate Madame Geoffrin, the clever old bourgeois gentlewoman who was not good enough to go to Louis XV.'s dissolute Court, who was laughed at by Madame du Deffand on account of a birth that excluded her from three parts of the society of Paris, but who was warmly greeted *en famille* by the Empress Maria Theresa, complimented by Joseph II., fêted by Prince Kaunitz, and regarded as his mother by Stanislas Poniatowski, the unfortunate King of Poland. In her white and grey salon, where the first thing that struck the eye was the absence of gilding, before a wood fire spluttering on the hearth a small square table was drawn up, on which was laid "a succulent supper," says Marmontel, all of the simplest description—soup, a roast chicken, spinach and omelette soufflé. And round the table what conversation was incited by the personality of the hostess, and by "three goddesses—the handsome Comtesse de Brionne, the beautiful Marquise de Duras, and the pretty Comtesse d'Egmont! The part of Paris played by Prince Louis de Rohan, a giddy-pate, volatile, *bon enfant*." Marmontel insinuates that in Paris's place he would have bestowed the apple on the last-named fair lady.

The Duc de Richelieu had abandoned what present-day fashionmongers would call "the family mansion" in the Place Royale (now des Vosges) for a fine modern hôtel in the Chaussée d'Antin, much as the Duke of Bedford in 1804 vacated

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Southampton (afterwards Bedford) House, which occupied the whole north side of Bloomsbury Square, to install himself first in Piccadilly and later in the newer and more fashionable south-western district now known as Belgravia.

In 1749, the Maréchal bought the Hôtel d'Antin, once the property of a scion of royalty, and paid a then well-known architect (Chevotet) large sums for restoration. There was a grand staircase by Brunetti, and a ground-floor gallery richly decorated with carved trophies, garlands, flowers, etc., in various coloured gildings. The first-floor salon was panelled in old lac with raised figures and Chinese landscapes. The large grounds communicated with those of the adjoining Hôtel d'Egmont. The garden contained two statues attributed to Michel-angelo, and was terminated by a row of horse-chestnut trees and a pavilion finished off by a large balcony overlooking the street below. On the garden side a square hall led into an oval vestibule chiefly composed of looking-glasses framed in wood carvings of great beauty. From this a salon was entered by three convex doors, the circular front decorated outside by Ionic pillars and classic masks terminated by a balustrade.

This pavilion was an object of much interest to the passers-by, who, however, no doubt worked on by the class of agitator who put up seditious placards, soon became affected by an exhibition of expenditure which seemed an insult to the national penury and which was regarded as proof positive of its owner's financial depredations during the wars that terminated in 1757. Admiration of the new building soon changed to contempt. The big hôtel was hidden from the vulgar gaze behind its sheltering walls and trees, but the little building "on the boulevard" seemed to invite criticism, and was nicknamed, in ironical allusion to the Maréchal's

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campaign, "Pavillon de Hanovre." A portion of it (probably less than is generally supposed) remains to this day, and is now used as a shop.[1] Part at least of the walls are still standing that once re-echoed to the sounds of Séptimanie d'Egmont's light laughter, and to the voices of her brother, the ugly, dissipated little Duc de Fronsac, and the boy whose tutor, the virtuous Abbé de Labdan, was engaged only by interesting the all-powerful Sophie Arnould in the education of the future Minister of Louis XVIII.

In a salon of the Hôtel d'Egmont one evening in February, 1771, a solitary lady in deepest mourning was musing over a book. Near by hung a life-size portrait by Roslin—"Le Suédois"—of which she was evidently the original. The *mise-en-scène* was one of those open-air rotundas, dear to the heart of the eighteenth-century painter, of which examples may still be seen in gardens of the style of Stowe and Wrest. These lend themselves to dignified portraiture, where the classic outlines of Corinthian columns alone break the becoming background of foliage and evening sky. Here the sitter, in white satin and pearls suggestive of the fashions of a bygone day (she always dressed in a style of her own), is seated on a yellow damask sofa strewn with the music of a guitar which lies beside her. Her unpowdered black hair is threaded with strings of pearls, and round her neck are a treble row of these famous heirlooms in the Egmont family. On a little table is a blue vase filled with flowers, and on the other side a small dog looks enquiringly at the melancholy dreamer. In the distance a gallery with a stone balustrade invites attention to the beauties of the park beyond. This picture was exhibited in the Salon of 1768, and is or was some years ago at Dampierre, the country-

[1] 33 Boulevard des Italiens.

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place of the Duc de Luynes: it was perhaps given by Comte d'Egmont to his sister, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, after the death of his wife. This position, dreaming over a book, was evidently characteristic, for Comtesse d'Egmont, the original, was doing the same on that February evening when her attention was attracted by the sound of carriage wheels in the court below, the opening and shutting of distant doors, the hurrying feet of servants, until finally the *portes à deux battants* were flung apart to admit a young man, medium in height, slim, agile, with irregular features and an intelligent expression, announced as Comte de Gothland.

Late on the previous day two young men, evidently brothers, had arrived at the Swedish Legation (afterwards famous as the scene of Madame de Staël's soirées) in the Rue de Grenelle, Faubourg St. Germain. The Count de Gothland and his companion, the Count of Öland, were received by the Swedish Minister bareheaded on the door-step, and were accompanied by about seven persons, among whom Comte Scheffer, a former Minister from Sweden to France, his brother Baron Scheffer, and Barons Taube and Ehrensvärde were easily recognisable. On the 9th the travellers went to Versailles, where, to the surprise of the uninitiated, they supped with the King; on the 12th, to the Dauphine's ball; on the 18th, a royal hunt was followed by a command performance in the theatre. Entertained at Marly on the 13th and at Choisy on the 22nd, the guests were greatly distinguished by the host, who had assumed a quasi-paternal, benevolent attitude, which let in light on the incognito of the Crown-Prince of Sweden and his only brother, Prince Frederick. While Louis-Auguste maintained his phlegmatic demeanour, the Comte de Provence was particularly friendly, unlike his sister-in-law, who was not agreeably impressed

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by the foreigners. Possibly Marie-Antoinette thought that members of the Reformed Church should be treated to a certain amount of the suspicion she bestowed on the literary outpourings of the "Protestant Sieur Hume." How little could she or any one else dream what the mere sound of the name Gustavus the Third was to mean to them in that incredible future, when he stood steadfastly by her and hers until the dagger of the traitor Ankowström stilled for ever the beating of the warm heart of that modern Bayard.

This visit was the work of an exiled Minister, too far off in Touraine to further the vital considerations underlying the social functions and sight-seeing that concealed the real objects beneath. Gustavus had long before this, his twenty-fifth year, given ample evidence of his energy and concern for the future of a country of which he was shortly to become King, and he was too worldly wise to neglect the favourite on whose caprices hinged many affairs of state. "I hear here of basenesses of the King of Sweden with regard to that woman," wrote Maria Theresa, "what a shame!" The exulting du Barry had in fact been honoured by his company at supper, and received from him a present of a gold collar set with diamonds and rubies for her dog. The Imperial ambassador was too just to withhold explanations: "It is true that the King of Sweden extended his political attentions to the favourite a little too far, Baron de Scheffer has cause to reproach himself"; but he adds that as regarded the supper the Swedish Minister had been hoodwinked by being assured that the Most Christian King would be present on the occasion, which he—of course purposely—was not.

At Chanteloup these proceedings occasioned a great ferment: the Duchess, too bitter to be just,

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wrote to Madame du Deffand, "He is a little *intriguant*, who has done what he can with his Comte de Scheffer to get hold of Mon. d'Aiguillon. . . ." Madame de Brionne regretted having "ever known the King." She could not say more, for she was perpetually hunting crowned heads. Madame d'Egmont was genuinely grieved on Gustavus's account. "How sorry I am about the means that were employed. The indiscreet zeal of Mon. de Scheffer stood you in bad stead on this occasion. If you knew what remarks he has excited, and how these made me suffer! How unjust party-spirit can make one."

Probably, although Comtesse d'Egmont was horrified at Gustavus noticing a woman whose existence she declined over and over again to countenance on any terms, she recognised that he was staking his all on a Crown. At Versailles the Most Christian King was waked from his well-earned repose by the news that Comte Scheffer had arrived from Paris at one o'clock in the morning and craved an audience, which "unprecedented honour" was granted, together with the privilege of beholding Louis XV. in his *bonnet* and *robe de nuit*. He was informed that while in the opera-box of Madame d'Egmont Gustavus had received a special messenger from Sweden[1] bringing news of the death of Adolphus-Frederick and of his own consequent accession. Having inquired whether his brother King wished to be treated as a crowned head and visited by his august self, Louis was speedily reassured as to the maintenance of his visitor's incognito, and forthwith resumed his interrupted slumbers.

After all etiquette had its uses; it ensured to the son the solitude and leisure he craved in which to lament the loss of his father and reflect on the

[1] March 1, 1771.

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enormous responsibilities suddenly thrust on himself. His marriage to the shy, gentle Sophie-Madeleine, daughter of the King of Denmark, had taken place four years before, and was a particularly unhappy union, dictated by reasons of State, and peculiarly distasteful to Gustavus's mother, Louis-Ulrique, who took a keen interest in politics and kept up a large correspondence with her brother, Frederick the Great. All this was an open secret to the French Ministry, for her "Reader" Beylon, a Swiss, was no other than a spy in the pay of France.

His kingdom threatened on one side by his redoubtable uncle and on the other by Russia, Gustavus could indulge in no illusions with such an object-lesson as Poland before his very eyes. He saw clearly from the start that, foiled in what might have seemed a natural alliance, the best hope for the preservation of Sweden lay in the support of France, and the continuance by that Power of a subsidy abruptly discontinued in 1766, when the Ministry under Choiseul demurred at bolstering up a "sterile anarchy."

The author of one of the most reliable works[1] on this period speaks of "permission being obtained to offer a present" to Madame du Barry, which one would consider quite as unnecessary as obtaining "introductions" to the presiding spirits of the first salons in Paris, where every door flew open at the bare approach of the visitors. Madame du Deffand threw over an engagement—"nothing so amiable as the King can be imagined": he was fêted and flattered at the Temple by one whose brains served to gloss over an equivocal position. Marie Campet-de-Saujon, married to and separated from Comte Edouard de Boufflers, acted the part of hostess to the guests of Prince de Conti, a large and brilliant company in which

[1] *Gustavus III et la Cour de France*, by Monsieur Auguste Geffroy.

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only some of the more rigid *grandes dames* of the type of Madame de Noailles took no part. Madame de Boufflers visited England on several occasions, knew Mr. Walpole very well indeed, and was accused of setting the fashion of Anglomania. She was intimate with Voltaire, and laid herself out for the entertainment of foreigners, among whom David Hume and Grimm never ceased to sing her praises or, when needful, to fight her battles. The haughty and intriguing Madame de Brionne lost no opportunity of making herself agreeable to Gustavus, and not content with the disturbance she had caused at the Dauphine's marriage was now indirectly harassing the Imperial ambassador. Marie-Antoinette had conceived a "particular affection" for the young Princesse de Lamballe, who as a Princess of the Blood was brought in contact with the Royal Family. Comte de Mercy, thinking her "gentle and amiable," had the good sense to approve such a natural friendship, seeing which, Madame de Brionne, who never seems to have kept quiet for a single moment, pounced on an opportunity for securing a royal connection for one of her own sons. This had been for years her *idée fixe*. Prince de Lambesc was ordered to hold himself in readiness to be affianced at any moment, and with this object Madame de Brionne went to Versailles without further parley to request the Dauphine to obtain the King's sanction. Comte de Mercy immediately hurried there himself, and with equal tact and energy pointed out all the perils of such intervention; the responsibility the Archduchess would incur; the probable disinclination of Princesse de Lamballe to lose her rank in France, and half-a-dozen other reasons for masterly inactivity. The poor little Dauphine "put so much grace into her refusal" that Madame de Brionne departed

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apparently quite satisfied, having by her mischievous pretensions retarded a friendship destined to entail such momentous results. The Empress considered the intervention of her mouthpiece "another proof of all the advantages that my daughter derives from your counsels," in which she was right.

The correspondence of another friend of Gustavus gives a glimpse of Marie-Antoinette as she appeared in this spring of 1771. There was living at St. Germain the second wife of the Comte de la Marck (a member of the great Arenberg family), whose grandson by his first marriage, Prince Auguste d'Arenberg, just established in France, took his grandfather's title in 1773. Comtesse de la Marck, *née* Noailles, was a childless widow, who enjoyed by Royal favour the use of a fine apartment at the Tuileries—the very rooms, in fact, afterwards occupied by Marie-Antoinette—and in the country lived at St. Germain, near her brother the Governor of that place. Many of her letters are dated from the Pavilion du Val, situated near the extreme end of the terrace of the ancient château. There James the Second and Mary of Modena, with the beloved daughter of his old age and exile, Louisa, "la Consolatrice" as he called her, spent their last melancholy years, perhaps wandering up and down the fine terrace—three thousand paces long—with its view of wooded slopes and glistening water stretching away to far-distant Paris. Like her brother, the Duc de Noailles, Madame de la Marck escaped the horrors of the Terror by dying—at the Hôtel de la Surintendance in June, 1793. Gustavus had only left Paris two months after visiting his uncle in Prussia, when he addressed his old friend at St. Germain from on board a warship in the Baltic:—

Speaking truthfully, my amiable Comtesse, do I not owe you a thousand reproaches? . . . Were I to count less

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on your friendship I should think myself quite forgotten: but I still flatter myself that you have retained some recollection of me. This is too cherished an allusion to be easily abandoned. You are aware that Kings like to flatter themselves. That is the title that alarms me, for I know you have no great love for them. I only beg you, if this is the case, to believe me always Comte de Gothland as regards you and to treat me as such. . . . When I recall the moments in which I saw you, the subjects of our conversations — even our disputes — the gay and charming society by which you were surrounded, and think of myself 500 miles away, it feels like a beautiful dream of which the recollection is as agreeable as the awakening is frightful. At this moment you are sitting in your garden with the Marquis de Castrie . . . a few saintly bishops are inveighing gently against the Court, more against the Chancellor, and possibly against Madame du Barry, but amid all this ill-humour your spirits make you laugh; a clear sky, art and nature in unison strike you only as the most agreeable and varied objects. And I—unfortunate aquatic animal, I sail in the middle of the ocean, I rage against the contrary winds that cause me to double the length of the road, and I say to myself: "If I were in Paris I should be near Madame de la Marck—I should see her, I should probably argue with her, I should make her rather angry by attempting the defence of my friends whom she does not like,[1] and then we should laugh. . . ." Apropos of Madame de Beauvau, I have a big case against her, and I beg you to undertake my defence. She accuses me, as I am told, of liking despotism. This is a capital crime on the part of all Kings (for I consider despotism as hurtful to the master as the subjects), but especially on the part of one who is to reign over a free people. Although I am in complete ignorance on what she founds her accusation, I beg you to tell her that I hope she will suspend her judgment until she sees by my actions whether her opinion is correct. I am soon embarking on a career where I can prove to her that I respect true liberty founded on reason and humanity, as much as I detest anarchy and disruption. In a few hours I shall re-enter my country. Laws that have been mutilated under the two last reigns by mutual encroachments, I shall swear to uphold and shall scrupulously maintain. Then Madame de Beauvau can judge

[1] This allusion is to Louis XV.

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for herself whether she is right or wrong. My brother, who has just come in, asked me to send you his heartfelt wishes. I end by begging you to excuse the scrap I send you, but I can find no other paper. . . .

To this, Madame de la Marck, *qui connaissait son monde*, responded :—

One must scold Monsieur le Comte de Gothland for the manner, cheerful in truth, but at the same time too free, in which he speaks in letters of Madame du Barry and of the Chancellor. He does not know perhaps that all are opened in the post, and that his was so also—I saw it by the seal where the coat of arms was covered by a little black wax. The King will know next Sunday what the Comte de Gothland has done me the favour of telling me: and if I am put in the Bastille will it not then be necessary for Mon. le Comte to return here in order to get me out? Joking apart, I beg Your Majesty not to speak of these people by post. . . . I went yesterday to Marly where the King has been for a week. They were playing *lansquenet* —one *sole* was of 12,000 louis, and everyone is dying of hunger! This species of flightiness made me sad and thoughtful for the remainder of the evening. Madame du Barry was playing at the King's table surrounded by the Royal Family. No one either at the table or in the salon spoke to her all the evening unless it was the King and her nephew, the little du Barry. This universal courage ought to open the King's eyes. He is insufficient to himself and in his children he finds no resources. His daughters have no brains, impossible to inspire them with any sense. The Dauphin exhibits a few clumsy virtues, without cleverness, or knowing why and wherefore: without book-learning or even any taste—rigid in his principles as he is rough in his actions. The Comte de Provence is mild, possesses cleverness and acquits himself well, but is self-extolling and—I will say no more for fear of displeasing your Majesty. His wife is ugly and sullen: it is said they do not like one another. The Comte d'Artois has cleverness, wit, a desire to please and to make those by whom he is surrounded happy. He is liked by all who see him: he grows, and is not so stout: he is the one on whom our hopes are centred, for assuredly the Dauphin and the Comte de Provence will have no children. . . . She is pretty,

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that Dauphine: she is clever and has a grace and charm in her whole person that is peculiar to herself, but her extreme youth, and a little frivolity natural to her age, render her useless to the King. Besides, he was displeased with her on Madame du Barry's account. If the latter falls, she will drag more than one Minister in her wake. . . . As to myself, I dwell in my forests, a poor hermit, listening from afar to the noise of the storm. In Paris the same trifling and cabals. Our young women go wild over brains and think of nothing else. They are all versed in State secrets, meddle in everything, make love as a pastime and devote all their leisure to politics or Court intrigues. A few marts of intellect where one mocks at the Almighty and religion, where one regards as idiots those who believe in both—there, Sire, in brief is a picture of our situation.

In the case of Comtesse d'Egmont Gustavus was more alive to the need of caution. Partly aided by her ingenuity a sort of cipher was evolved, and his letters were sent to Monsieur Harmensen, Rue Neuve des Bons-Enfants, Paris, enclosed in an outer cover directed to "Madame la Comtesse de S——" (after her Christian name), or to the great banking house of Hope and Co. at Amsterdam. From the sick-bed on, which so much of the last three years of her life was passed—she was only thirty-three when she died—she wrote, or dictated to a devoted friend who rarely left her, the long letters and memoranda to which Gustavus occasionally replied in a lighter vein. But that he in common with many others came under the spell of her mysterious charm, subtle and delicate with an underlying melancholy, is certainly the case. Returning from his Coronation he indited to her an epistle of twelve pages, and the following day appeared arrayed in her colours, lilac, green, and silver. From the borders of the Rhine he had written her a farewell:—

If I wanted to play the hero I should tell you that the joy of making a people happy and of carrying out the task

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allotted to me will alone console me for being for ever separated from you. . . . I prefer to own truthfully that amid the innumerable regrets I have in being a King, one of the greatest is having lost the hope of ever seeing you again. . . .

Among the papers of the King of Sweden at Upsala lie two packets labelled "Lettres de Brene,"[1] the wording of which is that of a devoted friend—nothing more. Politics play the principal part in these writings, the keenest interest in Sweden, in its young ruler's struggles, culminating in his *coup d'état* of August, 1772; good advice, encouragement, valuable information fill these old-time letters, still to be read, with their faint writing and yellow paper, more than a century after the early death of the writer and the violent end of him who filled her thoughts. Joined to it all are prophetic utterances on the parlous state of France, an involuntary demonstration of the curious far-sightedness of those whose days in this world are numbered.

Comtesse d'Egmont had the worst possible opinion of her cousin Aiguillon, whose mother had partially brought her up. We have seen from Comte de Mercy's letter what the merits of the rival candidates amounted to, and his estimate of Armand-Vignerod-du-Plessis de Richelieu was not unduly severe. It was impossible to deny that his government of Brittany had been marked by serious abuses. His disputes with the local administrations headed by La Chalotais, carried for adjustment before the Parliaments of Paris, resulted in the disastrous consummation of bringing the Sovereign into direct conflict with both. Those who spoke of Aiguillon with real or assumed enthusiasm as "the victor of St. Cast" found themselves opposed by a faction repudiating a right to any such title on the part

[1] The Château de Braisne, in Picardy, within the limits of the old Duché de Valois.

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of one who was supposed to have shown conspicuous want of courage, concealing himself, said his enemies (not the English), in a mill during the hottest part of the fight. "Well then," was the rejoinder, "if he did not cover himself with glory, at least he managed to cover himself with flour." And laughing and shrugging their shoulders, his lukewarm partizans ended the argument with their customary gaiety.

Like Samson, Choiseul nearly brought down the pillars of the house in his fall. During the bitterly cold winter's night of 21st-22nd January a hundred and sixty-nine presidents and councillors were exiled without warning — one to a rocky height near Lyon only attainable on horseback, his family following in *chaises-à-porteurs*; another to a lonely island on the sea; and a third to eat out his days in bitterness amid the snows of Auvergne, then regarded very much as an impromptu journey to the North Pole might be now. Party feeling ran high. In the salons of Paris murmurs reflecting on the evils of despotism and absolute power first started a cry destined to swell into a chorus that was taken up by the people themselves, and penetrated to the remotest corners of the Kingdom. The 10th April saw the solemn holding of a Bed of Justice at which the substitution of an Assembly at Versailles for the former Parliaments was resolved.

Thus was sounded by Louis XV.'s nerveless fingers the first note of the knell of the old Monarchy.

In her capacity as first lady in France the Dauphine evidently considered it behoved her to express an opinion on a situation charged with electricity :—

There is a great deal going on here just now. On Saturday there was a Bed of Justice to confirm the sup-

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pression of the old Parliaments and to appoint another: the princes of the blood refused to attend and protested against the King's will: they wrote him a very impertinent letter signed by them all excepting the Comte de la Marche, who behaved very well on this occasion. What is all the more astonishing in the behaviour of the princes is that the prince de Condé made his son sign who is not yet fifteen . . . the King told him to go away and the other princes also, and forbade him to appear before him, or before us. . . .

Conscious of the importance of her first political writing, of her six months seniority to the "impertinent" Duc de Bourbon, the Dauphine, obviously on her dignity, introduced "Your Majesty" at least half a dozen times into a couple of pages, where the phraseology and spelling incline one to the supposition that she was assisted by Vermond. Did this grandiose epistle give the Empress any qualms of conscience in regard to a childish little scrawl returned not long before to the Embassy in Paris annotated in her own handwriting—"Here is her letter, again very badly written and telling me nothing interesting"?

Comte de Mercy constantly urged the Empress to write, for, as he said over and over again, the smallest reference to her mother rendered the Dauphine amenable, when every other mode of persuasion had been tried in vain. Her strong affection for that stern parent was one of the most striking points in her character. But they sometimes forgot, though both Comte de Mercy and the Abbé repeated it on many different occasions, that gentle means were the most effectual. And it is very doubtful whether Maria Theresa *could* write moderately—she felt strongly and was too honest not to say what she felt. "The Empress deigns to write me a very gracious letter with her own hand," Mercy told Prince Kaunitz; "she explains the anxiety she feels on

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the grounds of the vivacity of the Dauphine, her want of application, the dangers of her position in so intriguing a Court, with such bad examples as she has here. I reply paragraph by paragraph all that I think most assuring to H.M. and calculated to allay the useless torments she gives herself." She wished the Dauphine would not ride, were less open to the "insinuations" of "Mesdames," and would talk less of Madame du Barry. Perhaps the Ambassador wrote details which excited the Empress for no profitable result except to upset Marie-Antoinette, whose mother evidently had misgivings herself on the force of her remonstrances:—

I send you her letter and my reply: I am ashamed of it, but you serve me too well not to be informed of everything: and (I wish to) to hear from you whether you approve of my way of taking my daughter.

Reading these admirable letters, so carefully edited and skilfully pieced together, we are apt to forget with what difficulty Comte de Mercy gained access to his charge. All the manners and customs varied at the different palaces, and as the Court was nearly always on the move it must have been very complicated.

In January he wrote:—

All the cabal would be enchanted to rid themselves of the Abbé. If Mesdames applied themselves continuously to inspiring the Dauphine with doubts as to the utility of retaining him in her service the consequences would be disastrous. . . . I myself could not without very great inconveniences appear too often at Versailles, and for some time back when I am there H.R.H. is seldom free to speak to me, and these obstacles are always occasioned by Mesdames.

The Empress was horrified, as well she might be:—

My dear daughter, It is said and it even excites surprise that you see this ambassador so seldom, that you only speak

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to him *en passant*, and that you appear more embarrassed than confiding with him. The example of the Queen your grandmother, and of your mother-in-law are cited, as they regularly received the Ministers of their families twice a week.

Vermond had to communicate with his chief in writing when the Court was at Versailles :—

I arrived *chez* Madame de Noailles just as she was getting up. I gave to one of her women Y. Ex.'s letter with the packet I brought.

A few moments later he was invited to enter: Madame de Noailles began by saying he could have given the letters direct to the Dauphine, and six minutes later asked the Abbé to show H.R.H. the ambassador's letter as a proof that everything must go through the lady-of-honour. Vermond thought it better to acquiesce without explanation and putting all the letters into one envelope went and scratched on the bedroom door.[1] The first woman-of-the-bedchamber opened it a little, saying that Madame the Dauphine was getting up. She took the letters in and both heard the Archduchess exclaim that a very short time was left for her to reply. Vermond said that the former "will give her protectress, Madame de Noailles, a summary account of my exactitude in showing Y.E.'s letter."

We know the contents of the Empress's letter to her daughter, as of the one to Comte de Mercy which accompanied it, full of misgivings on the fall of Choiseul :—

I fear we shall feel it only too much. The dismissal of Vermond is certain . . . and my daughter's failure. You will no longer have the same facilities to approach (her), they will not dare tell you everything. That abominable clique will spoil her and render her an object of suspicion or dislike

[1] No one dreamed of taking the liberty of knocking at a royal door. They scratched on the panels; presumably some one was waiting close to the door on the other side.

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to those who might advise her for her good. . . . I beg you to send me all details, and especially the observations and (describe the) expression of countenance of the Dauphin whom I do not think so idiotic, but entirely given up to, and led by, this clique as false, as hypocritical. If you hear from time to time anything of the Choiseuls and the causes of their disgrace, for their inconsequence and impertinences tolerated for so many years cannot be the cause of their fall, etc., etc. . . .

To Marie-Antoinette she wrote:—

Never forget that your *establishment* was the Choiseul's work, and thus recollect that you owe them gratitude. You have more need than ever, my child, of the counsels of Mercy and the Abbé, who, I fear, knowing his honesty, will be much shaken by this blow: but do not let yourself be inveigled by any faction: remain neutral in all. . . . Try to *tapisser*[1] your head a little with good books, they are more necessary to you than to another. I have waited two months for the Abbé's list and fear you have thought little of it; horses and donkeys have encroached on the time required for reading . . . but now, in winter, do not neglect this occupation which is more necessary to you than another, having no other accomplishments, neither music nor drawing, dancing, painting or other agreeable talents. I accordingly always revert to the reading: and you will charge the Abbé to send me every month what you have done, and what you propose to begin. . . ."

Can we imagine even a part of the Empress's horror and grief had she ever supposed that this letter, and many more very similar to it, would be seen by other eyes than those for which it was intended? Considering that it was addressed to a remarkably clever girl, whose grace and charm were already being discussed far beyond the boundaries of her own or her adopted country, it does seem rather strong, if not unjust; and, as Monsieur de la Rocheterie truly says, the Archduchess might very well have replied that she could hardly achieve in eight months at Versailles what she had

[1] Try to *carpet*, *i.e.* to line, your head.

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not been taught to do in fourteen years at Vienna. Considering her quick temper and her sensitive nature, it is remarkable how patiently she bore with her mother's strictures. It is still more wonderful when one tries to gauge to what extent she was flattered and courted by those who had not her real welfare at heart and whose chief anxiety was to reap advantages for themselves.

She gave orders for Vermond's admittance, and putting down the letter said :—

"The Empress speaks again of the reading—what am I to do?"

"Madame, I do not know what to say, I have come to the end of my latin."

On (*i.e.* the Dauphine) was a long time with the aunts on account of the King, then great "frisure" (hairdressing) for the ball—no writing.[1]

Before two o'clock he was sent for, presumably to her sitting-room. She spoke with "all goodness and confidence" and read the greater part of the Empress's letter aloud, seeming hurt by the paragraph quoted above, which Vermond copied for the ambassador's information :—

"See, Monsieur l'Abbé, if this were known I should get nice credit . . . she makes me out an idiot!"

My charming princess was piqued but not embittered. She listened attentively when I pointed out the sincerity and freedom of speech permissible in such a mother as hers.

Then she said to me:

"I shall answer that it will be hardly possible to begin regular reading during the carnival, until Lent. N'est-ce pas bon?"

"Yes, Madame, provided it is correct."

I am enchanted with the effect of the allusion to the reading, and am persuaded that if the Empress mentions it again she will perhaps not achieve all that she desires, but a part at least and a diminution of idleness. The paragraph

[1] Abbé Vermond to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, January, 1771.

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on the aunts, and what precedes it was carefully read, then she cried:

"There are always people who make the Empress uneasy," adding a hint that this might come from Madame de Starhemberg, who wants to meddle in everything ("qui veut se mêler de tout").[1]

And the Abbé remarked cautiously, "Nothing that is said or done at Versailles can long remain secret."

The Empress speaks of the balls, asks the names of dances and the performers, possibly with a view to objecting, and again suspicion falls on Princesse Starhemberg in Brussels, whom, in defiance of all rule, Vermond calls Madame de Starhemberg. Later on he alluded to the Duchesse de Polignac as "Madame Jules," a *petit nom* peculiar to that lady's intimate friends. The Dauphine, however, dictated for the Empress's information the list of those who were admitted to the little weekly balls she gave, occasionally varied by entertainments arranged by various members of the households—Madame de Noailles, Comtesse de Narbonne, Marquise de Duras, and even Comtesse de Marsan, that dangerous foe.

I had barely time to scribble (*griffonner*) the list of dancers: for the Dauphine had appointed three o'clock to see Princesse Christine.

This was a sister of the late Dauphine and a daughter of the Elector of Saxony and an Austrian Archduchess and coadjutrice of the Abbey of Remiremont. Three years later Comte de Mercy informed the Empress that the Princess had been rescued from the *hôtel garni* in which she was living on the initiative of Marie-Antoinette, who said she should be obliged to lodge the Dauphin's aunt in a portion of the late Queen's apartments at Versailles if a suitable dwelling could not be found—which, however, it eventually was.

[1] Abbé Vermond to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, January, 1771.

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The Abbé promised the ambassador that he should have the letters for Vienna on Wednesday after dinner. He had prepared for the Dauphine outlines of replies for "Mesdames (*sic*) Brandis, and Trautmansdorff, and Princess Charlotte," but was not sure that the last would get a letter in the end, as the Dauphine said she "might write in some days by the ordinary post." He added notes intended to facilitate the reply to the Empress. He then sounded H.R.H. on her views "on the Magistrates, hoping that, this time, she would not forget"; if that was so, it would be through no lack of vigilance on his part: "my eyes are always open, either through anxiety, or the enchantment with which she inspires me." He wrote all this because His Excellency's affairs might prevent the Abbé having the good fortune to *causer* with him . . . and he had the honour to remain . . .[1]

Marie-Antoinette did honestly try to keep up the reading and to furnish the materials for the monthly account to be sent to Vienna. But between the aunts and the interruptions of the Dauphin, who had to be persuaded by his wife to spare a little time from his shooting in which to improve his mind, and the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois, ceaseless moves, and daily receptions, there cannot have been time or facility for a child of that age and temperament to carve out a line of her own.

Can we be surprised that an ever-increasing dread of writing to the Empress pierces through the incomparable journals of Comte de Mercy? I have found it difficult sometimes to reconcile the harsh crudeness of the Empress's expressions with the reports she received from the faithful ambassador, whose rare sincerity impelled him to mention facts and speeches which he softened off in patient detail; doing justice to the charming

[1] Abbé Vermond to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, January, 1771.

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qualities, the honesty, the affectionate nature, and the kind heart of the child he so ably guarded. We know even at that chrysalis stage of her career what an effect she produced on strangers, impressions to which she herself cannot have been wholly blind. The Duc de Cröy wrote, very early in the day :—

> Madame the Dauphine succeeds more and more. Her politenesses were reflected in her face: she spoke a word to everyone with so much grace, curtseyed so prettily, that she enchanted all in a few days. Everyone said that she should be advised to remain as she was and to listen to nothing that might alter her: they feared her being told she did too much, and knew that if she changed, the blame would fall on her surroundings.

This is involved—it is so in the original—but comprehensible. It may have been an arrow launched at Mercy and Vermond, or at "Mesdames." It must be remembered that, had the Dauphine chosen to rebel against the two first, she would have been supported by every one at Versailles, excepting perhaps the King and negatively by Louis-Auguste, neither of whom, if the truth be spoken, counted for very much. The dexterity with which Comte de Mercy manipulated the different instruments he handled in the course of his work can but fill the student of his reports with admiration.

Where it seems, sometimes, as if he struck the same note too often, was in his insistence on the Empress's co-operation ; but it points to the measure of Marie-Antoinette's love and reverence for her mother that he who knew her best should have freely used a dangerous weapon. It also proves the absolute futility of hoping for any sensible support or co-operation within Versailles itself. But these stern reprimands from the Empress had the inevitable effect of making Marie-Antoinette's letters

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to her mother more and more strained and brief. It could not have been otherwise, although the Empress relaxed her sternness at times :—

. . . I am enchanted that you foresaw my intentions in the delicate matter of the exile of the Choiseuls, you will continue thus and not belie your beneficent nature. Do not allow yourself to be misled by contrary examples: do not adopt French levity—remain "bonne Allemande," glory in it, and (in being) friend of your friends. I must compliment you on having at last had the courage to speak to the King about the commission with which I had charged you for the Durforts; I knew not to what to attribute the long delay. . . . I beg you to tell me if you dance better than you did here, especially *contre-danses*; only good is spoken of these balls, giving me all the more pleasure as regards the Dauphin, and the change is put down to you. How happy you are. . . . I await with impatience the return of this messenger, (to hear of) your reading and application: it is permissible, especially at your age, to amuse oneself, not to constitute it one's sole occupation, to do nothing solid or useful, and to kill time between drives and visits; in the long run you will feel a void, and regret not having filled your time better. I must reveal to you that every day the style of your letters becomes worse, and less correct: in ten months you should have improved. I was humiliated in seeing what you had written to certain ladies here pass through several hands: it is highly necessary to practise with the Abbé, or someone, so as to form your hand, and acquire a more even writing. . . ."

Comte de Mercy answered similar inquiries addressed to himself. He again informed his sovereign that her daughter never wrote so badly as when addressing her august self, but this time he gave a different reason :—

She writes with too much precipitation, in the fear of being surprised by the Dauphin, or by Mesdames her aunts, to whom up till now she has not spoken on the subject of her letters to Y.M. From the beginning I laid great emphasis on this point, which H.R.H. has strictly observed. I have warned the Abbé de Vermond to redouble his efforts

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to endeavour to ensure some progress in the writing and spelling.

Some improvement was certainly effected, for when Marie-Antoinette's writing formed itself, as it did unusually late, she wrote a good and pretty hand, while she certainly spelt better in a language which was not her native tongue than most fine ladies of that time did in English—than the beautiful Lady Sarah Lennox, for example.

I send you a copy of my daughter's last letter: perhaps it does not fulfill your wishes; laconic as she is in her manner of writing, I fancy I trace some remains of temper, or else a great distaste for all application.

Comte de Mercy gave no hint of the real reason why the letters got shorter and shorter as time went on, and more and more constrained:—

I return the copy of the last letter of Madame the Dauphine: H.R.H. had talked to me of her embarrassment at speaking of Mesdames her aunts; as Y.M. remarks, it is very true that distaste for all occupations which exact repose cause the Archduchess to become so laconic in her letters. Her intention always is to say a thousand things to Y.M., but when it is a question of remaining seated at a bureau,[1] her vivacity introduces great obstacles; and that same vivacity often causes the Archduchess to attach to quite a short sentence a far more extended meaning than it is possible for anyone else to discern therein. She sometimes keeps to this method in talking, and it is only by dint of habit and reflection that I succeed in letting nothing escape me of what H.R.H. means to tell me, when she deigns to converse with me in detail. However, it is quite certain that she preserves in her heart a very real love for

[1] The frequent use of the word *bureau* calls for the explanation that it does not apply exclusively to the particular piece of furniture so named in England. What we call a writing-table is in France a *bureau* or *bureau plat*. The style of furniture used by the Dauphine is amply represented in the Jones Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and at Hertford House, where the Wallace Collection testifies to the generosity of a Frenchwoman little known in the society of a country to which she bequeathed so splendid a legacy.

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and obedience to Y.M. and that any trifling effects of ill-humour or impatience succumb before these sentiments.

It is impossible not to feel amused at the idea of the brain that was considered formidable in half the Chanceries of Europe being concentrated on these youthful effusions, as Comte de Mercy anxiously scanned the untidy pages prepared for the Empress's critical eye, and devoted all his abilities to unravelling those hidden meanings which the young writer assured him so earnestly she meant to convey. This same liveliness also afflicted Vermond, who described frequently to the ambassador the reprehensible manner in which, seated untidily at a table with what Comte de Mercy called her "habilliments" disordered by her games with the Misery children and the dogs, the wife of the heir-apparent to the Crown wrote her letters—or rather, as Vermond described it, "scribbled by leaps and bounds."

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CHAPTER XII

LOUIS-AUGUSTE

THOSE who cavil at Louis XVI.'s inability to deal with his subjects or his Kingdom, to evolve order out of chaos and method from madness, have possibly not studied the conditions obtaining in France as regarded its Government during the last years of his wicked old grandfather. With the fall of Choiseul the general aspect changed rapidly for the worse, and the year 1771 witnessed a series of events the momentous nature of which it would then have been hard for the most far-sighted politician to foretell.

One at least (Comte de Mercy) took a sufficiently gloomy view of the situation :—

> In spite of the contents of my official despatches it is almost impossible for Your Majesty to form an idea of the horrible confusion that reigns here in everything. The Throne is submerged by the indecency and extent of credit of the favourite, and the wickedness of her partizans. The nation exhales seditious suggestions and extravagant publications, in which the person of the Monarch is not spared. Versailles is become the centre of lying, hatred, and revenge; everything is effected by intrigues and personal opinions, and it appears as if all good feeling has been abandoned. . . . Your Majesty commands me to state whether the King has taken to drink. The report is unfounded, but may arise from the frequent evidences of absence of mind in the Monarch resembling the after effects of intoxication. . . . It is certain that the King's head is becoming weaker. . . .

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And to Kaunitz he thus summed up the situation :—

. . . All the decisions here depend on the caprices of a favourite and the intrigues of a few Ministers and courtiers.

In the general scramble for places it is not surprising that two principal prizes should have been drawn by probably the most unsuitable that could have been selected among the many candidates. On the 2nd of June the portfolio of Foreign Affairs was placed in the incompetent hands of the Duc d'Aiguillon, and about the same time the appointment of Prince Louis de Rohan, coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg, as ambassador to Vienna was practically decided. Madame du Barry had finally installed herself very comfortably in the apartments occupied by the late excellent Dauphine, Marie-Josèphe, just above the King's rooms and communicating with these by one or more concealed staircases. Quite apart from other considerations, the monstrous taste of such an occupation must have struck visitors to Versailles as noteworthy. According to those who have seen them recently the succession of small low rooms are empty and deserted: the golden shutters shed an air of mystery only partially dispelled by the scanty light that filters through the chinks and shows the elaborate decorations only just a little faded and dim. The carved and gilt mouldings of the fine *boiserie* are practically intact, and the only ornament is a bust of du Barry herself on the chimney-piece of the little salon. In her day this place was filled by a large clock with porcelain figures on its many columns. The middle of the room was occupied by a table painted by Le Prince, mounted in dull gold ormolu.[1] Two

[1] What is called ormolu in England is *bronze doré* in France, and has no likeness to our "bronze." The former in its perfection, as

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commodes faced one another, one of rare and priceless lac with gilt figures in high relief, the other showing Sèvres plaques painted after Watteau's designs, and on the marble top stood an ormolu group of five figures. From the centre of the ceiling dangled a very valuable chandelier in rock crystal, and on the wall hung a barometer by "Passement, au Louvre," also decorated with plaques in Sèvres, representing garlands of flowers. In an adjoining room a clock by Germain consisted of the three Graces supporting a globe, where a Cupid's arrow indicated the hour. A set of carved and gilt chairs were covered in white satin embroidered by hand in wreaths and bouquets of coloured flowers. The writing tables and cabinets also had porcelain plaques on green grounds, and a number of flower-bowls, scattered about on the table, were in the colour called "Bleu du Roi" with thick gold tracings and borders, and medallions painted in miniature sea-pieces or in scenes after Teniers' pictures.

As may be supposed, many Englishmen used what influence they possessed to gain admittance to the Sultana's receptions, and Mr. Swinburne accompanied the Duke of Dorset to her apartments after paying the last visit that any one made to the old King before his final illness. Mr. Swinburne notes the badness of the approach, "up a winding staircase more suggestive of a dungeon than the abode of beauty." The Duke thought the favourite *passée*, which, as she was

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in mounts by Gouthière and Caffieri, is metal elaborately sculptured and thickly overlaid with a hand-tool in several coats of pure gold. In certain old houses the lock plates and door handles, fenders, fire-irons, bells, etc., were worked in this manner, in imitation of the work of the great masters and finished off by a peculiar process of "water-gilding" which, for very many years, was to be counted among the lost arts practised in a day when both time and taste seemed less rare than they are at present.

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well over thirty and had not made her toilette and received the visitors in a *capuchin*, she probably appeared.

Monsieur de Nolhac very rightly points out that Vandyck's magnificent Charles I. (now in the Louvre), which was purchased for Madame du Barry at a sale and which is alluded to by her historians such as M. Vatel and MM. de Goncourt, could not have been hung, on account of its size, in any of these rooms. But it is not M. Edmond de Goncourt who is responsible for this mistake: he has merely copied Madame Campan. The real authority for the story was Prince de Ligne, who ought to have known better than any of those just mentioned, and who stated that Madame du Barry kept the picture on purpose to frighten the King on the score of his Parliaments. It was at Luciennes, the bijou country-house near Marly, that Madame du Barry (according to some writers) used to point to the huge canvas, remarking warningly: "Prends garde, la France, ton Parlement te coupera la tête." Writing from memory many years after the events, Madame Campan omitted to mention that there was no question of the little room at Versailles.

Luciennes must have been a gorgeous little place. Vulgar and worthless as its occupant was, it is melancholy to read [1] that she was literally hunted down by a trio whose moving spirit was a mercenary foreigner called George Grieve, a native of Alnwick, who considered the upheaval of everything in France an excellent opportunity for enriching himself at the expense of the miserable woman who had long before risen from the gutter to govern a great Kingdom through an effete King.

Thanks to the clever artist who, for the benefit

[1] *Paris révolutionnaire: vielles maisons, vieux papiers*, 1re série, by Monsieur G. Lenôtre.

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of posterity, has immortalised the splendid scenic effects that characterised the last years of an expiring dynasty, we can form a very clear idea of Madame du Barry's supper-room on a gala night. A water-colour in the Louvre, the work of Moreau,[1] represents the large dining-room of Luciennes on the occasion of a party "to meet the King." Most of the men wear the blue ribbon of the Saint Esprit, and the women in their splendid dresses, far from representing a different class of society altogether, belonged to the *crème de la crème* of the Court. Distinct from the footmen waiting behind the chairs, a major-domo posted behind the hostess holds in his arms a species of Italian greyhound, apparently a novelty in lap-dogs, judging by the attention the small animal excites. A pretty Marquise, unable from her seat to tease one of Madame du Barry's favourite white monkeys, or a blue parrakeet (apparently a turquoisine by the description), stuffs an Indian page with sugar-plums as he stands beside her, a strange gaudy little figure in high boots and a rose-coloured coat, with feathered toque decked with strings of pearls perched on his woolly hair. Only the principal guest looks bored and distrait: with one inert hand resting on the table and a lack-lustre gaze fixed on vacancy, he appears to be immersed in thoughts. Of whatever nature these were they probably had little reference to the dreadful past, still less to the infinitely more dreadful future. Why should they, in Heaven's name? As he himself prophesied, the Kingdom would last his time.

The page, Zamore, figures in a number of those apocryphal and generally mediocre paintings with which the large towns of Europe, and more especially London, were flooded after the fleeting

[1] Jean-Michel Moreau, "le Jeune," born at Paris, March 26, 1741, died there Nov. 30, 1813.

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restoration of the Bourbon line and the Empire. He is said to have been imported "du Bengale" by the "capitaine d'une frégate anglaise" as a child of five or six, and the inference is that he came from Chandernagore, the French settlement twenty miles from the capital of British India. If he was brought by official request by the Commander of an English ship there may be some curious correspondence on the subject reposing in the records of Old Calcutta. But, judging by another portrait unearthed by Monsieur Lenôtre (I believe) and now in the Musée Carnavalet at Paris, Zamore's features are more West Indian than East Indian or Bengali in type. He was educated, if such a term can be used, in the precise manner one would connect with the proceedings of a silly woman devoid of any sense of responsibility. When France was convulsed by anarchy Zamore developed into a seditionist of the worst type, and one of those unpleasant freaks by which Nature seems to demonstrate that foreign plants torn from their soil and surroundings may prove poisoned weeds in a new environment. He aided and abetted the most relentless enemies of one who, whatever her faults may have been, was uniformly generous to a friendless alien.

One is tempted to wonder whether the King ever regretted he had not married again, or whether he felt on such occasions as the party at Luciennes that an Archduchess might have been tempted to give herself airs on the score of such indispensable adjuncts to his Court as a Mademoiselle Bécu. Let us hope that Archduchess Elisabeth, in the safe seclusion of her abbey at Innsbruck, realised what an escape she had had.

That lady's younger sister had shown an increasing disinclination to address to Madame du Barry the banal observations which the King was

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so anxious to hear of, which the Empress thought might be restricted to five or six occasions per year, but which Marie-Antoinette shrewdly suspected would count for very little in the way of satisfying the expectations of those who backed logical conclusion. "They would never be satisfied with a word—it would always be beginning again," as the Dauphine observed to Comte de Mercy. Another letter had come from the Empress, which the ambassador said had had a great effect—an opinion we are unable to endorse, as it was destroyed. He chimed in with: "I pointed out that it formed part of the dignity of a great Princess not to apply criticisms to things one is not in a position to remedy"—a truism which others might take to heart. "A chilly silence was the one suitable disavowal . . . remarks merely indicated a feeble incompetence: open opposition to a cabal placed one to a certain extent on a level with this . . . and exposed oneself to the compromise that must be the only result." Persons attached to Madame du Barry had openly boasted of being coldly looked on by the Dauphine, and the ambassador very sensibly remarked that it would be better not to allow these "the impertinent satisfaction of supposing that H.R.H. occupied herself with them at all; and the most effectual punishment would be to address them from time to time with an air of easy indifference." If she would only consent to speak once to Madame du Barry herself, "it would have a disconcerting effect on the bad projects of all who paraded their resistance to the futile efforts of the Royal Family for their discomfiture." But this, it appeared in time, was precisely what H.R.H. would not do, and the long combat lasted for over three years.

Posterity has done her justice in this respect. Many of those writers who are most hostile to her

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have pronounced her to have been right in shrinking from so unnatural a contact; but then they have gone a step further, and inferred that the Empress and the ambassador were alike wrong in their remonstrances and the pressure they brought to bear on her for over three years. As a matter of fact, in theory the circumstances left them no other alternative but to adopt a course of action which to one if not both was extremely repugnant; and had they had an ordinary conventional character to deal with — such, for example, as that of the brides of the two next brothers — probably no difficulties would have arisen. The Empress lost sight of the fact, if she ever realised it, that no obligations in heaven or earth necessitated her, herself, seeing or speaking to individuals whom Prince Kaunitz (who, unless rumour did him grave injustice, had had a large and varied experience) called "these sort of people." Physiological researches were unlikely to intrude in the reflections of the simple, vigorous understanding that Maria Theresa brought to bear on statecraft, to the considerations of which, when necessary, she sacrificed her strong prejudices and uncompromising opinions as she did her personal tastes and inclinations. Like so many who never understood Marie-Antoinette at all, the Empress failed to recognise in her young daughter her own strong recoil from evil, far stronger than the mere instinct of the very young and thoughtless, for in Marie-Antoinette an innate purity of principle and conduct remained unsullied through years of dangerous contact and ignoble contagion. Later on, when all those barriers that fence around and about those who are born in the purple were hacked and torn away, and she faced the dregs of the people, "l'âme blanche"—as Monsieur de Nolhac finely puts it—the white soul of the Queen

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returned unsullied by the fiery furnace to the Great Giver of all good things.

Another point must be taken into consideration. What Comte de Mercy called her "miserable and pernicious surroundings" were not likely to have left her in ignorance as to all the undesirable details of a number of stories of which she should never have heard even at a much later period. With the exception of the Duchesse de Cossé, who joined the household eighteen months after Marie-Antoinette's marriage, and Comtesse de Noailles, nobody seems to have been trustworthy as regarded injudicious and objectionable conversation.

Did Maria Theresa underrate the danger?—

> They say that you neglect (the duty) of speaking to and noticing the great: that at table and at your games you only talk to your young ladies, whispering and laughing with them. I am not so unjust as to wish to substitute for natural conversations with young people whom you know, others with those whom you only see in public . . . in this imitate no one, follow what you have been taught and seen here.

Alas! what a gulf was fixed between Vienna and Versailles—between a Court presided over by a Maria Theresa and a Louis XV.

It is quite certain that in the *risqué* anecdotes, of many of which Madame du Barry was the heroine, the King himself did not get off scot free. The Dauphine was never on really pleasant terms with her grandfather, or indeed at her ease with him. For one thing she never knew exactly how she stood in his estimation, and his miserable habit of eluding every personal explanation was the worst method he could possibly have employed if he had any desire (which is not probable) to be of the smallest use to her, or to win her confidence. She was half bored, half frightened, more than half repelled. When she charmed him with her natural gaiety and a manner to which no one

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seems to have been wholly impervious, he marked his appreciation by attentions that put off more than they pleased her—kissing her hands, offering "mille caresses," and appearing in her room at Fontainebleau (formerly that of the late Queen) by a hitherto closed door, arrayed in his dressing-gown, making coffee and remaining for two hours. An English officer who, thanks to his naval uniform, succeeded in inducing the keeper of the private apartments at Versailles to admit him to the King's rooms, noticed nothing particular there excepting "a good coffee-mill in which Louis XV. always ground his own coffee," and the attendants volunteered the information that he also made his own punch and partook of liberal potations of that delectable refreshment.

Questioned by Mercy, the Dauphine owned ingenuously that "the fear of Mesdames always would prevent her speaking a word to Madame du Barry, but she would talk to the others"—next day she was very gracious to Aiguillon and Madame de Valentinois. A sensation at Court was the immediate result, and the cabal having (rather rashly) informed the Imperial ambassador of the great news, that astute personage seized on an opportunity "for which he had long been waiting" to reproach all and sundry with the futile and uncalled-for remarks ("l'ineptie et l'indécence") that had been widely circulated, attributing party-feelings to H.R.H., etc. Comte de Mercy added that but for the *mauvaise politique* of "Mesdames" he could have kept matters on this footing, but that he always had the chagrin of seeing what the judgment and good sense of the Dauphine had adopted checked by her aunts. The Dauphine probably knew a great deal about Madame du Barry and her clique that she never dreamed of confiding to the Empress, or even to the watchful ambassador;

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as, for example, that in the privacy of her own apartments the favourite endeavoured to retrace the false step she had made about Madame de Gramont, by lisping with her absurd accent that she found "la petite rousse sarmante" in the same tone in which she inquired: "Qu'est que c'est que c'est que le mercure? ze vourrais qu'on me le dit," and probably a great deal more that perhaps mercifully has not been handed down. We know that her name was never alluded to in the King's presence, while in the rooms of "Mesdames" the moment his august back was turned no one else was much talked of; so much so that the Dauphine's remarks were reported to Vienna and occasioned the Empress fresh anxiety. Comte de Mercy had to write to Prince Kaunitz:—

The Archduchess is consistently well treated by the King; her conduct is excellent, especially when she consents to ignore the councils of Mesdames her aunts; in short I have only what is agreeable and satisfactory to recount. If Her Majesty would only believe in the fidelity of my reports she would spare herself much disquietude caused by the indirect news which she obtains and which is nearly always controverted by facts.

And again and again:—

If only H.M. would spare herself the useless worry she gives herself.

It is probable that the little Dauphine had a shrewd suspicion where most of the Empress's information came from, in spite of such attempts to throw dust in a pair of childish blue eyes as, "Don't suppose Mercy told me—it is astonishing what is known here of the Court and private life," and "I am sorry to say it, but even to your aunts whom I esteem so much make no confidences: I have my reasons for saying this, perhaps even Mercy does not even know."

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The Empress intended her daughter to suppose other sources of information were being tapped, as, for example, that of Princess Starhemberg; and as a matter of fact the late Emperor's sister, Princess Charlotte of Lorraine, then residing in Paris, wrote all she could collect, rather to Comte de Mercy's dissatisfaction.

"One thing gives me great pleasure," wrote the Chancellor, "and that is the wisdom with which the Dauphine steers her barque in these stormy seas," which, as far as one can see, was quite true, and it is perhaps a pity that they were not content to let well alone. Undoubtedly this was not the only occasion on which "Mesdames" forced the hand of those who wished the Dauphine well. As the ambassador said, "There was more harm to prevent than good to achieve." But it was evidently his growing conviction, founded on information that has only partially transpired now, that Marie-Antoinette must be induced *nolens volens* to treat Madame du Barry in public with the easy dignity, the lofty indifference, of one whose unassailable position places her, so to speak, in a different hemisphere. Most unluckily Mademoiselle Bécu was not content with her payments and privileges. One sees all through her history and her actions that her one idea in life, her *idée fixe*, was to succeed Madame de Pompadour in her position at Court, and above all in the political heights to which the talents of that remarkable woman had elevated her. Joined to a handsome personality, Madame le Norman d'Etioles possessed the mind and many of the qualities of a born politician. Unfortunately for herself, she was born of the wrong sex, and in a state of life in which she had at her command only one means of attaining the status for which her own instincts told her she was so well fitted. Immorality

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with her was a means to an end. Bad and unscrupulous as she was, she surely deserves commiseration in that she had such a successor—such an imitator—as Jeanne Bécu, who, now that she had been the indirect means of placing Aiguillon and Prince Louis de Rohan in important posts, was probably awaiting autograph letters from Maria Theresa and Frederick the Great. Madame du Barry herself saw nothing absurd in her hope of seeing herself addressed as "my dear cousin" by either or both. Hence it follows that she would not rest until she found herself placed by the future Queen on a footing as nearly as possible identical with that of her predecessor in regard to the late Marie Leszczynska.

Comte de Mercy drew up an admirable précis of the situation for the Empress's consideration :—

It would doubtless be contrary to all propriety, and even to the dignity of the Dauphine, that she should have shown any marked attentions to the members of the dominant party; but in view of the existing condition of this Court it appears to me to be equally imperative that H.R.H. should appear not to be aware of what is going on, and should betray no dislike or aversion. The Archduchess is supposed to ignore the rôle of Madame du Barry here: consequently H.R.H. can only regard her in the light of a woman who having been presented at Court is in a position to participate in the treatment accorded to others in similar circumstances.

On this premise, it is my duty to submit for the exalted consideration of Y.M. whether it might be convenient that when the Comtesse du Barry finds herself among the circle of ladies who pay their court to the Dauphine, H.R.H., who speaks to all, should also, on one occasion only, address a word to the favourite—either on her dress, or her fan, or some remark of this nature. It is certain that such a course would cut short much cavilling; of this I judge by the effect of two or three words spoken by the Archduchess to the favourite the last evening at Marly and necessitated by the exigencies of the game. I have also noticed that Mesdames, while inciting the Dauphine to a severe and silent demeanour, do not themselves neglect little underhand conciliatory atten-

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tions for the Comtesse du Barry, and this behaviour is all the more remarkable, inasmuch as it seems as though they always wish to push the Dauphine into the breach in order that she may demonstrate a dislike which others dare not manifest on their own account.

Long afterwards, in the darkest hour of his life, Louis-Auguste broke through his reserve, and unfolded himself to the noble Malesherbes on the subject of the wife who had so early linked her fortunes with his own :—

You saw her arrive at Court when she had barely emerged from childhood. My mother and grandmother were no more; and my aunts had not the same authority over her. Placed in the midst of a brilliant Court in close proximity to a woman whom intrigue had placed there, the Dauphine had before her eyes a constant example of profligate display. What opinion was she not likely to conceive of her powers and rights, she who united in her own person so many attractions? To live in the society of the favourite was wholly unworthy of the Dauphine: forced to take refuge in a kind of semi-retirement, she became accustomed to a life exempt from etiquette and restraint[1]. . . .

The Comte de Provence also alluded, after her death, to his sister-in-law's position at Court. He says that Madame du Barry's enmity to Choiseul and the impossibility of the Dauphine "treating with any distinction a woman whose birth had placed her in the lowest ranks of society, and whose conduct in no way merited her leaving them," all contributed to alienate his grandfather from the girl for whom he had "a natural *penchant*." He adds that "her manners did not please Louis XV., although he did not tell her so, whilst his favourite spoke of it loudly" (which bears out one's impressions of the King's deceit). "Thus, at fourteen the Dauphine found herself the first lady at Court without any one to control or advise her, for the Dauphin was too young and inexperienced to

[1] *Souvenirs du Baron Hüe.*

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be the guide of his wife, or even to teach her the customs of his country. . . . Her husband's aunts could have no real authority over her" (they could have had plenty had they known how to behave), "and if the manners of the Dauphine, which were those of Vienna, appeared to them too free and easy, theirs, which were those of old times at Versailles, seemed absolutely gothic to the Dauphine."

This is instructive. The favourite lisped how excellent were her intentions and principles, coupled with tearful comments on the strange malignity of her enemies. The Empress remonstrated with her daughter in terms far too strong and harsh to suit the circumstances—of which, as her child well knew, she had not gauged the full enormity, and the ambassador made earnest representations founded on a consummate knowledge of the world and of men. The youthful Princess against whom all this battery was directed was too young and unsophisticated, too honest and high-minded, to pretend to sink prejudices founded on temperament and character.

"Mesdames" were more or less gratified at events which gave them something to talk about and varied the monotony of unnaturally restricted existences. Madame Sophie thought and spoke as her elder sister told her to do. The far more amiable Madame Victoire liked a quiet life, and Madame Adelaide, incapable of pursuing any consistent course of behaviour, was ready to condone any one's bad behaviour provided some advantage to herself was likely to accrue. She went on the plan of not seeming to see Madame du Barry, and that worthy, with all her native impudence, lacked the assurance to force herself on the Princess's notice. So the favourite directed all her batteries against the child whose only sincere protectors were a foreign ambassador and a provincial priest.

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In May, the Royal Family moving to Fontainebleau to receive the latest bride, the Comtesse de Provence, Comte de Mercy was highly delighted with the superiority of his Archduchess, who showed to great advantage, and mindful of lectures did not forget to mingle with "the easy and friendly air joined to all conceivable graces," attentions to the King which the ambassador described as "cajoleries that produced a great effect." He did not admire either the Comtesse de Provence or her younger sister, married to Comte d'Artois, and having circumvented the projects of Madame Adelaide to sow dissension between the Dauphine and her sister-in-law, troubled himself little about either of the Italian princesses, excepting in such matters as affected his special charge. Marie-Antoinette never showed to greater advantage than with these two girls, who, unfortunately, proved little susceptible of the friendship she was longing to show to both. Nor, indeed, were the sisters much attached to one another, and there is little doubt that the intrigues of the strange being who afterwards became Louis XVIII. were in full swing even in those very early days, for after his grandfather's death letters from both Comte and Comtesse de Provence were found among the old King's papers by his successor, clearly proving the double game played by the younger, assisted by his wife, who was soon completely under his influence. The first sight of his sister-in-law at Fontainebleau so excited the Dauphin that he exclaimed in his hoarse squeaky voice, "Hou! hou! la mienne est plus jolie."[1] And directly the King saw the bride he remarked that "he found her very ugly indeed." Comte de Mercy thought her manner bad and disagreeable, she spoke little and was without charm. He was unusually

[1] Madame du Deffand to the Duchesse de Choiseul, May 16, 1771.

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scathing about the younger sister, who arrived at Fontainebleau a year later—"an extremely small figure but without too shocking defects: a thin face and a white skin, a very long nose disagreeably terminated, eyes badly turned, a large mouth—in short an irregular physiognomy of the most common." There was clearly little about either sister to remind any one of old stories of a charming girl whose marriage had linked the houses of Bourbon and Savoie, and whose attractions were recalled by those who appreciated Marie-Antoinette, and who declared that her manner with her grandfather was very like that of his own mother, Adelaide of Savoie, with Louis XIV.

The immense household provided for the newly married couple gave rise to endless squabbles and jealousy, the aunts, as usual, chimed in, and an empty exchequer was drained to find money for the extravagant fêtes ordered by the King. The contrast may be imagined when it transpired among the public that the Duc de Duras, knowing how fond the Dauphine was of dancing, had proposed to inaugurate balls at Fontainebleau in the autumn, but had been told that H.R.H. desired no money found for her amusements while her own servants remained unpaid.

When the Royal hunt was pressing hard on the tracks of a poor gasping stag, and already enjoying in anticipation the grievous spectacle of its death, the Dauphine requested the cortège to diverge into roundabout ways in order to avoid trampling down some fields of wheat, for damage to which the cultivators were scantily compensated. Only the previous November she had been kindly permitted by Madame de Marsan, who desired to ingratiate herself, to take Princess Clothilde with her, and while returning early on her account, a leader in her carriage fell while crossing a bridge—four horses passed over the postillion's body. He

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was picked up senseless and covered with blood, and for more than an hour the Dauphine remained in the road, sending every one right and left in search of doctors, appliances, and help of all kinds, addressing every one, beginning with an Exempt of the Guard who seems to have been very useful, as "mon ami." Relating all this afterwards, she said, "I told every one they were my friends. I said, 'My friend, go and fetch a surgeon!' 'My friend, send for a hurdle!' 'My friend, if he is conscious, listen if he speaks.'"

The following year the horse belonging to an outrider attending the Comtesse de Provence slipped when proceeding through the town of Compiègne, and it was generally remarked that, while the Princess continued on her way apparently quite unconcerned, the Dauphine, who was following, ordered her carriage to be stopped at once, and insisted on the unfortunate man receiving all the attention he required.

Perhaps the best known of these stories is that of the peasant of Achères, a small village in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, and it is hoped it is not too hackneyed to be introduced here on account of its undoubted authenticity. The description by the accurate Comte de Mercy tallied with that of Vicomtesse de Choiseul, who was actually in the Dauphine's carriage. An unfortunate stag, turning on his pursuers, attacked a wretched peasant who was digging a plot of ground, wounding him in two vital parts of his body. The wife, half beside herself at the sight, rushed to meet the hunt and fell senseless at the horses' feet. The King stayed a few moments and departed in another direction; but Marie-Antoinette, who had meanwhile reached the spot, got out of her carriage, held smelling-salts to the poor woman, supported her in her arms, and issued rapid directions for treating

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the wounded man, who eventually recovered, thanks to the unremitting attentions of at least three Court surgeons detailed by the Dauphine to attend him. The poor woman regained consciousness to find herself supported by a young girl, who whispered words of consolation in her ear, shed tears over her, and finally placed her in a magnificent carriage, in which, accompanied by two villagers, she was driven to the hovel in which she lived, further cheered by a considerable sum of money. Comte de Mercy added that over a hundred spectators shed tears as they watched the Dauphine "in an immobility caused by surprise and admiration of a scene as unique as it was touching." And Princesse de Beauvau, the intimate friend of the Choiseuls, added that "the Dauphine obeyed the voice of nature and the Dauphin that of his wife!"

Her voice had an increasing power over Louis-Auguste, and although Comte de Mercy's admirably turned phrases sometimes convey the impression that he was colouring his encomiums a little highly in his efforts to tranquillise and ease the Empress's over-burdened mind, the narrator's general accuracy is beyond criticism, and he was beginning, moreover, to cast some of his spells over the apparently impenetrable Dauphin, who dropped a good deal of his constitutional reserve when in the company of the ambassador. The latter reported a few months later:—

> This young prince has acquired the habit of talking to me, and this is all the more remarked on, inasmuch as he hardly speaks to anyone. I am on the footing of replying frankly to his questions. A short time ago he asked me whether I like hunting and shooting. I told him I liked these as an object for exercise, and that to my mind they were only useful from that point of view: I enumerated the inconveniences entailed when these amounted to a passion,

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the dangers of extreme fatigue, the loss of precious time so valuable for the education of princes, and for which they are answerable alike to God and man. All the strong opinions I expressed were listened to in silence, but quietly, and the Dauphin has only treated me better since.

The Comte de Provence, young as he was, had already mapped out a line for himself, and it suited him exactly that his bride should adopt the same line in her turn. This speedily gave the Dauphine the impression, fostered no doubt by Mercy and Vermond in order to counteract her excessive frankness, that the Comtesse de Provence was also rather underhand. Marie-Antoinette made no secret to the Comte de Provence of her opinion of *his* character: but this had no effect in checking his tendency to intrigue with his grandfather and the Ministers on every possible occasion. The indefatigable Comtesse de Valentinois, "faint yet pursuing," had succeeded in obtaining the post of lady-in-waiting to the Comtesse de Provence through the good offices of her patroness, Madame du Barry. Having obtained the consent of the young couple to honour with their presence a kind of thanksgiving fête which she was to give in honour of the marriage, the lady-in-waiting also managed to secure the attendance of the Dauphin and Dauphine. The latter, with her usual energy, reproached both her brother- and sister-in-law with their manner to Madame du Barry, who was delighted with the reception she had met with from at least one of the princesses.

Returning alone one day from the aunts' apartments to her own through the interior private passages, Marie-Antoinette passed an open door, behind which she distinctly overheard the Comte de Provence making some underhand proposals to the Duc d'Aiguillon. Impulsive as usual, she rushed into the Dauphin's room, and throwing

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herself on his neck, exclaimed: "I care for you more every day, my dear husband: your frank and honest character charms me, and the more I compare you with others the more I recognise your worth."

It was very fortunate that Marie-Antoinette set such a high value on sincerity and truth, and had been brought up with very un-French notions of the obligations of married life—on which, as we know, the Empress held the most rigid opinions possible. The Dauphin's good qualities were a long way below the surface, and any bridegroom less likely to appeal to the imagination of a young and essentially charming girl it would be difficult to imagine. Louis-Auguste was ungainly—one might almost say uncouth—and he had a number of tiresome tricks, one of which at this particular time was to fidget with a valuable piece of china that stood in the centre of the Comte de Provence's sitting-room mantelpiece. Marie-Antoinette, who adored "chaff" herself and had no idea why any one else should object to it, was rallying her brother-in-law one day on his obvious uneasiness on the score of his precious ornament, when the Dauphin let it fall with a crash on the floor—a parquet—where, of course, it was smashed to atoms. The owner, greatly incensed, ran at his brother, who defended himself with his fists until the combatants were separated by the Archduchess, who received a scratch on her hand. Thanks to her tact the brothers were speedily reconciled, and no whisper of the little scene transpired before the Dauphine herself told it to Comte de Mercy, owning that she had been slightly alarmed and on the point of calling for help. In view of similar contingencies arising between these irresponsible children in the future, the ambassador begged his Archduchess to settle disputes herself, with closed doors—explain-

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ing that it would be a serious thing if one of the princes were suddenly discovered attacking the heir to the Crown.

Louis-Auguste, a great uneducated schoolboy at the hobbledehoy stage of one who in his thirty-nine years of life never succeeded in emancipating himself completely from that chrysalis period, presents himself from first to last as an exasperating enigma. Why if he was not a fool he behaved so like one as regarded his wife is a perennial problem to careful readers of his history. Many of his proceedings can only be accounted for on the ground of imbecility; yet the quick, impatient, none too lenient Emperor Joseph declared explicitly that his brother-in-law was in no sense an imbecile. Marie-Antoinette discussed the Dauphin quite dispassionately from the first—a habit in which they apparently one and all indulged. She wrote to her mother that his truthfulness compared most favourably with the inherent insincerity of the Comte de Provence and that she herself would always prefer the one whom "le Ciel" had allotted to her. It is to be feared, however, that there was more of Choiseul than "le Ciel" in the matter. The bad manners of the Bourbons struck one accustomed to the stately condescension of the Empress and the almost exaggerated simplicity of her eldest brother as something amazing. None of her short experience of life had prepared her for people who made such speeches as that of Madame Adelaide when her niece was expatiating on her own pleasure in the happy marriage of her favourite brother—the Archduke Ferdinand—with the heiress of the d'Estes. "Really," said the old princess, "*we* are very sorry about it, because that marriage would have exactly suited the Infant of Parma." As Madame Adelaide's hopeful nephew was then married to Marie-Antoinette's sister this

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was a particularly spiteful double thrust—"et Mad. le Dauphine en paraît fort choquée," wrote Mercy. No wonder. She probably considered the aunts too old to mend their manners, but those of the Dauphin caused her keen anxiety. He had taken to returning so late from shooting or hunting that his slovenly appearance indicated the haste with which he had donned his clothes. Marie-Antoinette exhorted him to come back much earlier, in time for the play. He generally kept his grandfather waiting "a long time." She was in the King's rooms when the Dauphin, appearing very late, approached her with a sheepish air, mumbling:

"You see I have returned in good time."

"Oh, in beautiful time," returned the young lady tartly, turning her back. During the entire evening she avoided speaking to him, and told him frankly in private—that is, before probably a dozen or more members of the suite and servants always on the watch to listen and repeat—that his ways were very hard on those who were at all attached to him, that his rough, *gauche* manners afforded no compensation for what these had to endure, and that in short he would end by making himself hated by everybody. Louis-Auguste listened with submission and apparent contrition, begged her pardon and promised amendment, and the following day he endeavoured to mollify her by increased attentions, as she reported with commendable pride.

In a letter from Fontainebleau or Versailles (probably the latter), she relates that she had accompanied the Dauphin out shooting, when he had shot forty (pheasants) to his own gun. This, however, was after an unusually severe reprimand delivered in the rooms and the presence of the Comte de Provence and his bride, when the

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Dauphin tried to avert further remonstrances by beating a hasty retreat. He was followed to his apartments by the incensed Dauphine, who continued her remonstrances with so much energy that he began to cry—whereupon the tender-hearted, if hasty-tempered Marie-Antoinette proceeded to weep also, and these two children mingled their tears together. After "un raccommodement fort tendre," as the ambassador described it, the young couple returned together to the rooms of that other pair of children—even younger in years but immeasurably older in worldly wisdom—where the trouble had begun. These inquiring whether peace was restored, the Dauphin is reported to have answered with quite unusual readiness and gallantry that "the quarrels of lovers never did last long," a response that savours of Mercy's diplomatic pen. The Dauphin was supposed to be improving in his health, which we are assured once gave rise to much anxiety; and Marie-Antoinette conceded handsomely that "his complexion was certainly clearer." She herself cannot have been at all strong. She was always catching colds, partly, no doubt, brought on by the stuffy, hermetically-sealed rooms at Versailles, a great contrast to the open windows at Schönbrunn and Laxenbourg, where the Empress, suffering from chronic asthma and abnormal *embonpoint*, was obliged to live in a gale of wind, to the horror of her Chancellor.

A good many of what Comte de Mercy called *piquanteries*, of discussions and squabbles, were certain to arise among people who were too young and silly to be left to their own devices with such unoccupied minds. After dinner one summer's afternoon at Compiègne the Dauphine was playing at piquet with the Comte de Provence. During the game the Dauphin, who was wandering about

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the room, continued, regardless of a number of remonstrances, to tap his brother's arm with a little switch. Losing patience, Comte de Provence seized the cane and tried to drag it away in spite of the other's increasing resistance. Both got rather heated, when the Dauphine approaching took the cane, and snapping it in two, put an end to the argument. When she related this to "Mercy," he begged her to use her influence with Louis-Auguste to persuade him to cease such badinage in future: he received the remonstrances with "gentleness and docility," promising to be more careful. "He has nothing against him but the consequences of an excessively bad education: he displays essential qualities of character, is straightforward, and listens to the truth which can be told without circumlocution, as the Dauphine does daily." She often enacted the thrice blessed part of a peacemaker, and was frequently treated by her sisters-in-law, especially the younger, with a good deal of ill-humour, mostly founded on jealousy and inspired by "Mesdames" in despair at seeing their influence on the wane. Louis-Auguste is supposed to have said on more than one occasion that no one had taken the trouble to teach him how to read and write. Comte de Mercy often heard him complain bitterly to his aunts and others of his wretched education. He seems to have been much too good-natured to his brothers, who certainly took advantage of him. Out shooting one day some time after he became King, he remonstrated with the Comte d'Artois for killing a hen-pheasant.

"Why, you shot one yourself just now," was the reply.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Comte," said the King, laughing, "I fancied I was at home here."

That volatile youth was not the only person

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who required to be kept in his place, and for that once, at least, the old Louis XV. was quite right when he sent for Madame de Noailles, and after observing that his granddaughter allowed herself to speak too openly about what she fancied she saw and that her incautious remarks might produce ill effects, proceeded to object to something else. She had taken to carrying *comestibles* with her out hunting; these she caused to be distributed to all the young people who crowded round the carriages; too much familiarity in the surroundings was the result, and too little reserve in the Archduchess's demeanour. He considered the display of "her natural gaiety" all right in the bosom of the family, but in public and when she held the Court . . . and so on. Madame de Noailles complained to Comte de Mercy that she herself was nearly always excused on these occasions, when her place was filled for the time being by some younger and gayer member of the household. The ambassador sensibly told her it rested with herself to insist on the rights attached to her post, and informed the Empress how essential it was that Marie-Antoinette should be attended by some one of an age and in a position to restrain the tendency of the French to become "easy and familiar"—to which they were more inclined, he added on another occasion, "than any other people on earth." This was probably the case, and also was almost the chief reason of the tales that were invented about the Dauphine. The Austrians, who loved her, and the cool, phlegmatic English, who admired qualities so unlike their own, would have understood her far better than the gay, fascinating people whose charms had descended to her in more than one particular through François de Lorraine.

We have already seen that the principal re-

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sponsibility for providing her with no suitable companions of her own age rested with Madame de Noailles. That of preventing her taking exercise adapted to her liveliness and temperament must be laid to the account of the Empress, who, when she exacted a promise which was nearly certain to be strained if not broken, must have known that the objection she alleged on the score of the riding did not exist. And real cruelty lay in addressing to the poor little Dauphine a single word on the subject.

Is it surprising under these circumstances that the donkeys made their appearance once more? It is said that the *Gazette d'Utrecht* was suppressed for having inserted a paragraph to the effect that during one of these expeditions in the forest the Comte d'Artois, playing silly pranks, had had a fall, that he was imitated by several ladies of the suite, chief among whom Madame the Comtesse de Noailles had suffered a serious *culbute*. What is amazing in all this is how little idea any one had of respecting the privacy of these unfortunate young people. Indoors the Dauphine had again sent for the children to amuse her, and "very noisy, *malpropres*, and *remplis d'inconvénients*," said Comte de Mercy, they occupied a great deal of time, besides breaking the furniture.

We may suppose that by this date Marie-Antoinette had moved into the late Queen's rooms at the head of the huge marble staircase, concerning which the chief authority, Monsieur de Nolhac, gives us some information.[1] Seeing all around her examples of the most prodigal and senseless display, the little Dauphine interposed

[1] Monsieur de Nolhac is credited with the statement that the Dauphine moved into her own rooms about two years after her arrival. His superior knowledge of Versailles, of which he is Curator, has dispelled many legends.

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peremptorily, like the spoilt idle child she was, and scolded poor Monsieur de Marigny so severely for delays in the alterations to her bedroom that he was fain to address a humble memorandum expressive of his regret and the impossibility of obtaining any money on account. Mr. Walpole was in Paris during the summer and took a keen interest in these matters:—

> The distress here is incredible, especially at Court. The King's tradesmen are ruined, his servants starving . . . nine millions are being struck off *la caisse militaire*, five from the marine, and one from the *affaires étrangères*, yet all this will not extricate them: you never saw a great Nation in so disgraceful a position. Their next prospect is no better, it rests on an imbecile, both in mind and body. . . .

Poor Louis-Auguste was not quite that—he had even answered quite sensibly when a lady of the palace observed to him that such a model of grace as the Dauphine must dance well if she gave herself the trouble to learn.

"Everything she does is becoming to her," said the boy-husband; "we must own that she is charming."

During her absence at Compiègne she had ordered some bookcases to be made for a room at Versailles. This was done after designs by Gabriel, whose drawings still exist in all their elegant simplicity. Great was the indignation of the Archduchess at the aspect of the unadorned panelling, and without further parley she had the whole erection taken down before her eyes, ordering elaborate decorations, carved, gilded, with glasses and pediments, to be ready at the conclusion of the visit to Fontainebleau. It is said that the aged Gabriel had never encountered such autocratic moods in the French princesses he had served; but nothing in the history of Madame Adelaide and her sisters inclines one to suppose

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that their servants had an easy time. Nor were they possessed presumably of the taste which later on inspired or at least constituted the motive-power of the superb style associated for all time with the name of the most inartistic King that artistic France ever possessed.

Under Louis XV. even pillars of the Church set an example of reckless extravagance, and Vermond's patron, the Bishop of Orléans, had fallen on evil times. One of the old princesses had drawn out the Bishop on the subject of Madame du Barry, the object of their mutual detestation, afterwards repeating the conversation to the King. Promptly exiled to his see, the Bishop was "not allowed to go and visit his mother, past fourscore," which may have had the effect of throwing him into less reputable company, for a considerable portion of the large sums expended by Marie-Madeleine Guimard on the house she was now adding to the sights of Paris were the clerical revenues put by the Bishop to these singularly unclerical uses, supplemented by the great head of the Rohan family, the King's intimate friend, whose name is associated in one's mind with a well-known sauce. Mademoiselle Guimard's house in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin was built by le Doux, the King's architect. The four columns of the porch were decorated in Conflans stone and were surmounted by a group representing Terpsichore crowned by Apollo. Adjoining it was a theatre for 500 people with a ceiling painted by Taraval, a miniature of that at Versailles. Later, the pre-eminence of the "Temple of Terpsichore" was disputed by the residence built for Mademoiselle Dervieux by Brongniart in the Rue Chantereine.

"Economy and retrenchment are the words in fashion," wrote Horace Walpole to Lord

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Strafford. "I have heard of no instance of luxury but in Mademoiselle Guimare (*sic*), a favourite dancer, who is building a palace round the *salle à manger* where are windows that open on hot-houses that are to produce flowers all the winter." The writer was doubtless struck by the contrast to his own country. There King George, strong in the force of conviction and example, had addressed weighty remonstrances to Dr. Howley, Archbishop of Canterbury, who in all the odour of sanctity, intensified by an irreproachable domesticity at Lambeth, had held "routs" on a Sunday, in direct contravention of the Lord's Day Observance Act of Queen Anne, of late blessed memory.

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CHAPTER XIII

GUSTAVUS III.

Was it during this memorable year that, before a large company in a salon of the Hôtel d'Egmont, Mably tore up his own book, regretting loudly that he had ever published a work in praise of Royalty?

The King of Sweden was loyal to his odd liking for Louis XV., and in writing to various fair correspondents in Paris made some attempts to excuse the ill-considered action of his old friend in the affair of the Parliaments, urging a justification for high-handed measures in the excesses of those in England and the death of Charles the First. Chief among Madame d'Egmont's many devoted friends (not restricted by any means to those of the opposite sex) was one who belonged to the inner circles of that particular section of Society which was held in supreme contempt by the Court party, and which numbered among its ranks such illustrious names as Turgot and Malesherbes. In an old house in the Place Royale the serious and dignified family of President de Nicholay included a sister-in-law of President de Lamoignan, married to the Marquis de Mesmes. Beside the sick-bed of her dear Septimanie at the Château de Braisne she indited a lengthy memorandum for Gustavus's information, preceded by a brief note:—

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I begged Madame de Mesmes to collect the principal facts in order that Your Majesty may see on what I found my views. I was too ill to undertake this work, besides which my friend is more capable of it than I. . . .

An excellent authority who has studied its many pages in original says that its writer "skilfully demonstrates the enormous difference in the two constitutions as regards Parliamentary powers. With remarkable reasoning precision she affirms that fanaticism alone, still subsisting among our neighbours in the seventeenth century, could have occasioned such excesses, and that the France of her day was at least not liable to that great scourge. She was right no doubt: for she could not foresee the cruel contradictions which another sort of fanaticism was destined to inflict on France twenty years later."[1] Madame de Mesmes wrote:—

The cause of the Parliaments is not only become general because they were asked to decree that Royal power has no limits. Such a right should be that of no King, and is assuredly not that of a King of France. . . . It is against despotism set up as an axiom—it is against those high words, "I hold my power from God and nothing on earth has the right to limit them"—that the nation has revolted. This language appears to be founded on the Scriptures, which declare that it was God Himself who gave a King to the Israelites, but the writings add that it was in His wrath that God gave the nations a King.

This was plain speaking to a crowned head, but plainer still, if more personal and less cleverly expressed, was to follow when Maréchal de Richelieu's daughter resumed her pen:—

One thing afflicts me, Sire, and this is your praise of our King. If you use politics with me, how can I believe in the friendship with which you flatter me? and if this is not political, how can I explain what you write to me of his goodness? He is governed by weakness alone. . . .

[1] *Gustave III et la Cour de France*, by Monsieur A. Geffroy.

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Y.M. accuses me of not loving the King. Alas, this is not my fault, and regret at not being able to profess the most noble sentiments makes me heatedly proclaim the opinions with which you reproach me. This is so engrained a feeling that the other day at the representation of Bayard at Versailles I would have given my life's blood for one tear from the King: but, if you had seen his air of indifference, the bored looks of the Dauphin, and the laughter of Mesdames at that touching picture of the sentiments of our nation for our Kings, you would have shared my despair at the sight of so charming a nation *dénaturée* and such interesting, such heroic virtues made impossible. How can I support the sight of one who enjoyed the felicity of being adored with ardour and who would be so once more if he had left us the slightest illusion, who was glad to destroy all and who now views with *sang froid* such a change? Ah, Sire, what powerful resources are placed in your hands! You, the idol of your nation and who would be that of ours, *you* speak on behalf of one who never knew a feeling! In Heaven's name, never mingle that apathy in the charming letters with which you honour me, and believe that we shall never be Russian slaves, only the most submissive and faithful subjects. A word, a look suffices.

It may be easily imagined what risks were run in the then state of the posts by those who wrote on affairs of State in such a strain as this. So the Comtesse adds:—

I implore Y.M., if I am honoured with an answer, to write by one of your own messengers, not by a French one. You know that the slightest imprudence would be the misfortune of my life.

And the thick packet was done up and sealed by the two authors and despatched to Comte Creutz in Paris. They were not always so cautious. Two years later in a room at Versailles d'Aiguillon caught the Swedish Minister between two doors, and seizing him by the button of his coat, thundered: "How do you suppose, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, that I can answer for your master's secrets if he spends his time writing them to the fair ladies of Paris?"

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Poor Creutz, sadly nonplussed, muttered something about "only concerning insignificant matters."

"In that case," answered the Minister meaningly, "have you discussed them with Madame d'Egmont?"

The Swedish Minister was quite aware that a long letter from his King to Comtesse d'Egmont alluded to the possible return to office of the Duc de Choiseul, besides deeply incriminating the Spanish ambassador, who had launched forth on the French Ministry. Comte Creutz hurried off to Madame d'Egmont, who, overstrung and in failing health, took a jaundiced view of a transaction which, as she well knew, would call down on her devoted head a fresh outpouring of the vials of the wrath of her father, who had quarrelled with her over Madame du Barry and refused to see or speak for many months to his only daughter. She seemed to think Creutz had not used proper precautions, and a general coolness was the result. It was a network of intrigue — almost impossible to unravel. Comte de Mercy's great friend, Comte Fuentes, who had made so bold a stand against du Barry when the other members of the Corps Diplomatique basely acceded to the King's wishes, now seemed to be altering his tactics also, and in a conversation with Aiguillon expressed himself with regard to the favourite in a conciliatory spirit.

Prince Kaunitz comments on this to Comte de Mercy:—

> I confess to you that I found the language of that good man Fuentes so singular on the part of one whose mind appeared to me hitherto to be far removed from intrigue that it makes me fear that the vice may be contagious—like so many others. I do not think, however, that it will ever possess either you or myself. Adieu, mon cher Comte: aimez toujours un peu votre bon ami qui vous aime bien.

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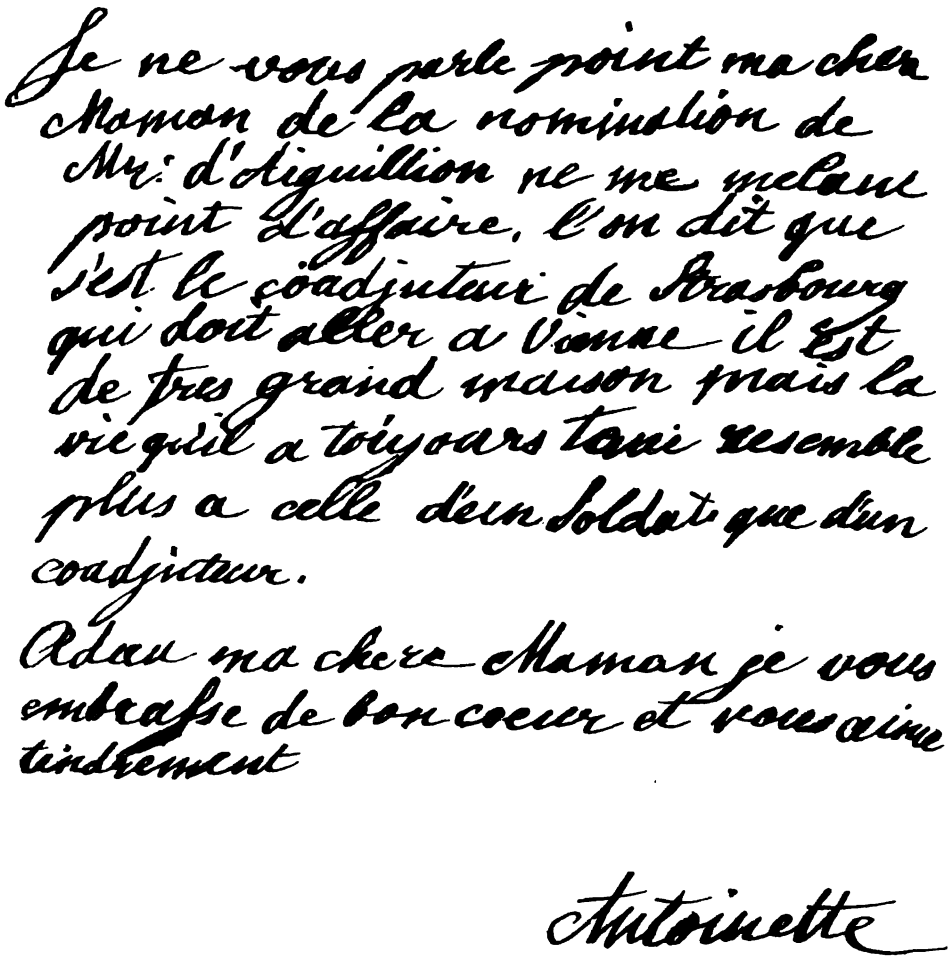

Je ne vous parle point ma chere
Maman de la nomination de
Mr. d'Aiguillon ne me melant
point d'affaire, l'on dit que
c'est le coadjuteur de Strasbourg
qui doit aller a Vienne il est
de tres grand maison mais la
vie qu'il a toujours tenu ressemble
plus a celle d'un Soldat que d'un
coadjuteur.

Adieu ma chere Maman je vous
embrasse de bon coeur et vous aime
tendrement

Antoinette

Facsimile of conclusion of the DAUPHINE'S *letter to the* EMPRESS-QUEEN, *June* 21, 1771.

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The Dauphine's contribution to the news of the day consisted of a few lines (June 21, 1771) :—

We arrived yesterday from Marly: I returned here on foot. I am sorry to find myself back at Versailles, having enjoyed myself very much at Marly. There were a number of people, they played before and after supper: once when the King was away we danced, which was very amusing and my sister[1] seemed enchanted. We leave on the 16th of next month for Compiègne.

I do not speak to you, my dear Mamma, of the nomination of Mon. d'Aiguillon, not wishing to mix myself up in business. They say it is the Coadjutor of Strasbourg[2] who goes to Vienna. He belongs to a very great house, but the life he has always led is more like that of a soldier than a Coadjutor.

This experienced judge of men and morals had not much improved in her writing, judging by a facsimile of this sheet, and she wrote "de très grand maison"—apparently undetected by Vermond and his pencil.

Before this, the Empress had written, referring to the Dauphine's comment on St. Mégrin—"more intriguing and wicked than his father" :—

I am very glad after what you tell me of St. Mégrin to be quit of him; but it is high time to send us an Ambassador—even to nominate a Minister—for it is very difficult to explain oneself without, and if it were not for you, my dear child, Mercy would have been better employed anywhere else than remaining thus in inaction: but you would lose too much—I may say everything.

And to her letter to Comte de Mercy of April 1, 1771, the Empress added a postscript :—

The situation of my daughter pains me, and without yours and the Abbé's help I should be wretched about it. I own I do not want to see here the son of that miserable

[1] The writer's sister-in-law, Comtesse de Provence.

[2] Prince Louis de Rohan, born in 1734, nephew of Prince de Soubise, and of Comtesse de Marsan. In 1760 he had been nominated Coadjutor of the Bishop of Strasbourg.

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de la Vauguyon as ambassador from the hand of that woman. . . .

By the Empress's wish Prince Kaunitz had been recently called into a kind of consultation over the Dauphine, who, when the newly appointed Minister, Aiguillon, was presented as such to the Royal Family, had not addressed to him one single word, while "Mesdames" and the Comte and Comtesse de Provence had talked to him for some time. This contretemps was due to no omissions on the part of Comte de Mercy, who, on the pretext of a desire to attend the new plays acted at Versailles, had spent some days there with the object of fathoming several budding intrigues, and had, moreover, made earnest representations to his wilful little Archduchess on the urgency of "treating well" the new Minister. The Duc de Richelieu had worked himself into a fresh fury over his daughter, who declined to accompany the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, when, according to etiquette, she and her near relations should have made a round of the Royal Family, ending up with a complimentary call on Madame du Barry. The Duchesse de Fronsac was dead, and the Duc de Richelieu made a violent scene with his daughter and forbade her seeing even the old Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who had practically brought her up and was devoted to her.

Returning to Versailles on a Tuesday, according to the immemorial custom of the ambassadors, Comte de Mercy perceived that the Duc d'Aiguillon wished to have a talk with him, and the conversation opened with some remarks as to a possible marriage between the Emperor and Madame Marie, as, at that date, they all called Princess Clothilde, the elder of the Dauphin's two sisters. But the eagle eye of the Imperial representative soon detected the real upshot of the matter.

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Starting with a number of protestations which probably had the effect of putting his visitor more keenly on his guard, the Duke went on to praise the character, the grace and the judgment of the Dauphine —all of which Comte de Mercy hardly knew how to reconcile with complaints of certain "écarts de conduite" that had greatly affected the King, by whose order Aiguillon now spoke. These consisted in her showing an over-marked aversion for some of those who composed the King's chosen society; not content with this, she spoke of them in uncomplimentary terms that were invariably repeated; and lastly her demeanour was "far too lively and childish"—all of which grievances united to alienate the King's feelings for her, while he felt that some remedy must be devised without delay. "All this was very surprising"; and although Comte de Mercy saw the dangers of compromising himself—in view of the personage with whom he had to deal—it was nevertheless imperative to return some reply, the essential being to protect the Archduchess—"de la mettre à couvert." He seems to have been the only person who ever thought how necessary this was, or had the requisite tact and ability to achieve it. His reply was admirable. He briefly sketched the principles with which the Archduchess had been imbued in her own home; entered into details on the goodness of her mind, character and intentions; so long as she herself was her only guide there had been nothing to reproach her with, but outside influences had been brought to bear, pernicious counsels had been given to her, and, moreover, they "had dared to speak to her of things that she should neither see nor know." Then the ill effects had appeared, of which it was easy to see a source which it was difficult to counteract, especially as long as it did not suit the King to speak direct on what displeased him, or to

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signify his wishes at first hand; the gentleness of the Dauphine would ensure an instantaneous effect, but so long as no one spoke to her it could only be inferred that they were satisfied. As to a few frivolities and trifling indiscretions, the Dauphine had cured herself of a number; hence it was not she but her surroundings, that should be held accountable for others, and it would be highly "unjust to expect of a princess of fifteen a composed and serious demeanour quite unsuited to her age"; her "gaiety, innocent and naïve," indicated a warm heart and a sincere nature far removed from falseness or harm.

The Duke began his reply by expressing his opinion of "Mesdames" in no measured terms; laying great emphasis on the advisability of the Dauphine seeing Comte de Mercy more frequently, a desire of the King which he (Aiguillon) had had orders to transmit. He touched on his cold reception, but added assurances of his own respectful attachment for the Dauphine, while Comte de Mercy on his side said that his duty to his august sovereign, his zeal for her daughter's welfare, and his anxiety to contribute to whatever might tend to promote a good understanding and harmony at Court, would impel him to do his best. In spite of this, he informed the Empress that Aiguillon was quite capable of trying to make mischief between Marie-Antoinette and himself, in which case he would have to travesty all the ambassador's expressions, which was "what one has only to expect on the part of persons as intriguing and unreliable as the *parti dominant*." It also seemed to him clear that all this had been pre-concerted in the councils of Comtesse du Barry, with the object of persuading the Dauphine to treat her better. The same desire entered into the choice of Prince de Rohan ("this ecclesiastic is entirely

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given up to the cabal") for the Embassy at Vienna.

The Empress replied that it was worthy of remark that the Duc d'Aiguillon had brought the same reproaches against the Dauphine that the King had detailed to Madame de Noailles, adding in her own hand:—

I have communicated your report in extenso on Aiguillon to Kaunitz, as you told me you were sending him some extracts.

The Chancellor despatched a lengthy reply by return messenger exposing all his views to Comte de Mercy and enclosing a sheet to be read aloud to the Dauphine, did his dear friend judge right to do so, in which he flattered himself she would perceive the sentiments of a reasonable man, who had thought only of her when he composed, etc., etc., etc. The whole was an exceedingly diplomatic appeal to the feelings of "mon papa" and to Mercy; he said that as regarded other individuals "the mere choice of a prince ought to be respected, over and above which through respect for him one owes attentions to these sort of people. Prudence even tells one that this is necessary—because they may be useful and they can do no harm."

All this was very expressive of the head of a diplomatist of sixty-two, but not likely to commend itself to the heart of fifteen. Unfortunately it would have been quite useless to try and make Prince Kaunitz comprehend the horror with which "these sort of people" inspired the Dauphine. He would have had no sympathy with a sentiment of that nature. The Empress's suite once told Mr. Swinburne that when the Chancellor drove openly about Vienna with an actress of notorious character in his carriage, the Empress felt it behoved her to expostulate. "We are here," he is reported to

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have replied, "to discuss the affairs of Your Majesty —not my own." It is doubtful if this speech was actually made to Maria Theresa, but it expresses what Prince Kaunitz doubtless thought on more than one occasion, when her well-known views on morality proved inconvenient.

After a great ceremony at the Parish Church of Compiègne the Dauphine returned at six to a long talk of an hour with the Imperial ambassador, who executed his orders by informing her of what Aiguillon had said, and further read her the letter which Prince Kaunitz had written on the situation, with the Chancellor's instructions for her own guidance in an explanation with the King. She showed a marked repugnance to the course proposed, and reminded Comte de Mercy that when, on his advice, she had begged the King to speak to her himself instead of discussing her with Madame de Noailles, who had given her a garbled account of the interview, her grandfather had returned no answer, looked "very cold" and changed the conversation at once. As to Prince Kaunitz's advice she was quite ready to be guided by his opinion, but felt sure that had she an opportunity of talking the matter over with him and giving him her reasons, she would bring him round to her own views.

The sagacious Chancellor took the matter *en philosophe*:—

> What you tell me of the Dauphine's remarks on the occasion of the interview you asked for has all the appearance of a defeat. . . . However that may be, I am quite easy on the subject of the impression produced on her by what I told you, because I only expressed myself so openly for the relief of my conscience, by order of the Empress, and through inclination for the Dauphine—as, when all is said and done, these are *her* affairs. . . .

It is easy to see how useful Vermond was to Comte de Mercy. For example, the latter

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deplored a "très gros rhume," which detained him in Paris, and he despatched the Empress's and other letters to Marly, directing the Abbé to present them and to inform the Archduchess that the ambassador had some important matters to communicate to her, matters involving consequences more serious than she was able to imagine. She closely questioned Vermond, who, acting under orders, returned vague replies, which had the effect of stimulating her curiosity and making her rather anxious. She was again seated next to Madame du Barry at lansquenet, and assuming an expression of ease (which she was far indeed from feeling), indicating neither "annoyance nor disgust," addressed such remarks as the game demanded to that strange interloper, without affectation and within judicious limits. The next evening at Versailles the Duc d'Aiguillon presented himself at the ceremony called "jeu de la Dauphine," when that young lady spoke to him repeatedly with a charming air of gaiety, at which one is glad to hear he had the grace to look embarrassed, and let us hope to feel heartily ashamed of himself. But these evanescent efforts did not satisfy Comte de Mercy, who took a serious view of the remarks of the King, conveyed on two occasions by Madame de Noailles and on the third by Aiguillon. The ambassador lectured H.R.H. at great length on the general situation and her own line of conduct. She listened with due attention, and then "sketched in the portraits of the persons actually in favour—with astonishing precision," agreeing as to the necessity of care in the treatment of these people. The day of the review of the King's household Marie-Antoinette sent word to the Duchesse d'Aiguillon that a place would be reserved for her in the Royal carriage; and when the Duke presented the

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Coadjutor of Strasbourg as ambassador designate to Austria, the Dauphine treated the first of her two most deadly foes with kindness, and made some appropriate remarks to the other.

Had Mercy been able to see into the future to an extent that even his sagacity could not reach, his sensations would have been far different on that June day, when his grave anxious expression relaxed as he read the account of his charge's demeanour to the two men bowing low before her in acknowledgment of the gracious little speeches of compliment and welcome. The harm that Aiguillon did to his Queen only ended with his death, when his son pursued the same ignoble and wicked course. Indeed the latter's enmity had commenced at a much earlier age, for on the memorable 5th–6th October, 1789, the last night on which a King and Queen of the old *régime* in France slept under the roof of Versailles, there were many to notice what Comte de Provence long after called the "triste rôle," played by the Duc d'Agenois, who, dressed in woman's clothes, was seen encouraging the mob in their work of destruction.

Comte de Mercy's efforts, however, were crowned with transient success: Madame du Barry praised the Dauphine to the skies, drawing between her and the Comtesse de Provence comparisons very unfavourable to the latter, who, contrary to all the expectation of the "cabal," had treated the favourite in a cold and reserved manner. And, on his side, the Duc d'Aiguillon begged Comte de Mercy "to direct him as to the methods best calculated to win the confidence of the Dauphine," the reply to which was that "nothing would be easier, inasmuch as the character of the Archduchess rendered her peculiarly sus-

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ceptible to any signs of attachment on the part of others."

On Sunday, August 28, the Dauphine was present as usual at the public game of cards, followed by the "grand couvert." The best description I have ever seen of this curious custom was written by an English naval officer who was present at one of these functions some months later than the date in question. The odd thing is that he says the room was not only excessively crowded, but very small. At nine o'clock several great officers of State entered, followed by the King and the Royal Family. Louis XV. put his hand in his pocket and drew out three long rolls, which he placed on the horse-shoe table; he then seated himself, after which the Dauphin sat down on his right, but much lower, the Comtes de Provence and d'Artois next. On the King's left hand was Marie-Antoinette, with the Comtesse de Provence next to her, and

> Mesdames . . . who though young are very fat and far from handsome. There was a large piece of roast beef before the King, of which he ate very heartily: and I thought the beautiful Dauphine played her part very well. . . . When the King drinks a taster calls out with a loud voice, "Drink for the King" and a salver is brought with an empty covered glass, one with wine, and one with water. . . . I observed he drank no wine by itself, nor was he served on the knee. I do not recollect any Sovereign but the King of England who is served so. . . . Old Louis did not seem cheerful, but sat in his armchair without speaking more than two or three words to the Dauphine: to every other person he was silent.

Captain Collier goes on to relate how the attention of "old Louis" was attracted by the beauty of an English lady whose name he does not mention, but who was evidently accustomed to being admired, and also to being treated with great respect, for she was by no means pleased when first the Monarch and afterwards Marie-Antoinette

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herself sent two "noblemen" to ask her name, and continued to gaze at her at intervals, thereby, as the party was afterwards assured, making Madame du Barry very uneasy when she was told what had happened. When supper was over the King rose and dipped his fingers in a gold basin which two more "noblemen" held, the Dauphin presenting a napkin for his grandfather's august fingers. They then all left the room, followed by the ladies of the various suites, who had sat on benches behind them during the repast. Before the English visitors left ice-creams and sugar-plums were offered to the lovely Mrs. "G." and immediately declined.

None of the foreign ambassadors had hitherto recognised the favourite until this Sunday,[1] when that worthy's indefatigable friend, Comtesse de Valentinois, invited Comte de Mercy to a supper at Versailles, to which he went, chaperoned by the Sardinian ambassador, Comte de la Marmora, and the Papal Nuncio. The company consisted of the Duc and Duchesse d'Aiguillon, the Duc de la Vrillière, some ladies-in-waiting, and Madame du Barry :—

This was the first time I had found myself *vis-à-vis* of this woman: the Sardinian ambassador talked to her first as one does to an acquaintance: the Nuncio showing a strong desire to join in the conversation. I thought it expedient to be more reserved, and it was only after the favourite had addressed me that I talked quite naturally to her. I received on her part greater distinctions than she showed to others: I did not place myself at the table, and Comtesse du Barry on the pretext of returning home before eleven did not eat supper either. The conversation was on indifferent subjects, interrupted by the Duc d'Aiguillon, who taking me on one side informed me that the King wished to speak to me in private, and had charged him to propose that I should repair to the Comtesse du Barry's (apartments),

[1] August 28, 1771.

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where his Majesty would see me. Without hesitation I replied that I should go wherever the King desired, and added smilingly, that after my promise to the Duc d'Aiguillon to speak to him quite openly I could not hide from him that this project of the King appeared to me to have no other aim than a desire to make me go to the favourite's (apartments): that without entering into the pros and cons that hitherto guided the ambassadors' conduct it was certain they had all refused up till now, and that I was unable to explain even to myself why I should be chosen as the pioneer ("choisi pour planche") on this occasion. The Duke replied that my conjecture was unfounded: that the King had told him two evenings before that he wished to speak to me and that he (Aiguillon) had proposed that the Monarch should see me in his study at an hour when the antechambers were comparatively empty. The King rejecting this proposition answered: "You know I am not lodged here[1] in such a manner as to be able to see him *en bonne fortune*, therefore engage him to come and see me *chez* Madame du Barry." Moreover, in order to put me thoroughly at my ease, the Duke begged me to inform the ambassadors that I was going to Madame du Barry's by the King's wish. I had no rejoinder to make, having firmly resolved not to leave any of the ambassadors in ignorance of the motive of my proceedings: but before I had an opportunity of doing so I learnt that the Sardinian ambassador had already signified his desire to call, and that those of England, Venice, and Holland were determined to pay a similar visit.

Comte Fuentes, Mercy's friend, was away in Picardy staying with Comte and Comtesse d'Egmont and the only child of the house, Septimanie's stepdaughter, married to Prince Louis de Gonzague, the Spanish ambassador's second son. Hence the former's absence from Comtesse de Valentinois's supper passed almost unnoticed, and on his return to Compiègne in company with the new Neapolitan Minister, Caraccioli, the Chancellor thought it an excellent opportunity for repeating the previous entertainment at his own house, and he included the new arrivals. To the surprise of

[1] At Compiègne.

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everybody the first returned the card, saying he had not yet had the honour of calling on Maupeou, and refusing to visit Madame du Barry. All this was put down to the influence of Comtesse d'Egmont, and a fresh series of family quarrels was the result. Neither a serious illness nor a bad accident could soften the flinty heart of the old Maréchal, and the only people who smiled on his daughter at this juncture were Marie-Antoinette and Louis-Auguste, who received her with marked cordiality and made many inquiries after her health.

These, the most authentic accounts obtainable, serve the further purpose of showing that Horace Walpole was unusually well informed:—

For the misery of his people and the dangers of his successor (if he escapes himself) the King I think will triumph over his country: the princes of the blood are firm, and the people curse the King, the Chancellor, the favourite, and starve. . . . The Chancellor is . . . very able, very enterprising, and after being the most servile flatterer proves the most inhuman tyrant. . . . The besotted old Bien-Aimé . . . shudders for his own life. . . . This street-walker has just received the homage of Europe. The holy Nuncio and every ambassador but he of Spain have waited on her. . . . Fuentes alone would neither bend the knee to her or the Chancellor. The Dauphine, who is governed by her husband's aunts, paid no regard to her good mother's instructions, and would not speak at the presentation.

It may be remarked that Mr. Walpole maintains a discreet silence as to the proceedings of his friend Lord Harcourt; nor were the instructions alluded to quite such as he probably supposed.

About this time the Empress wrote:—

My daughter is, in truth, very clever at sketching portraits: I only wish she would regulate her behaviour on the basis of the knowledge she knows how to deduce from the character of various men.

I am very glad she begins to treat the Duc d'Aiguillon better. Without entering into personalities she should act

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in the same way with the people of the *parti dominant*, even the Comtesse du Barry, addressing her on indifferent subjects as she does all the ladies admitted to Court by the King. She should ignore what this woman is, and treat her well, without condescending too far. Perhaps such treatment might serve to rouse her aunts and weaken their too great influence—always supposing the Dauphin agrees: if he disapproves it would perhaps be preferable that my daughter should continue to avoid Madame du Barry.

What a pity they did not adhere to this! Had Louis-Auguste had sufficient initiative and force of character to make a stand, it is possible that the King would have had no alternative but to give way. It was a miserable beginning to a bright young life and a stern initiation into the mysteries of its seamy side. For, of course, the little Archduchess knew pretty well all there was to know about Jeanne Bécu. The suite had taken care of that. Only thirteen days later the Duchesse de Villars died, having been practically non-existent since Marie-Antoinette came to France. Had Madame de Noailles, also, been supplemented at an earlier date by some one reliable and efficient, how much harm might have been spared! For, during those first months—a year and four months to be strictly accurate—the mischief was done. The two chief posts in the household were deplorably filled, one by a great lady who was neither clever, tactful, nor amiable, the other by an invalid who neglected every branch of her intricate duties.

In all the number of attendants, from the highest to those in quite subordinate positions, two or three at the most were to be trusted with the bringing-up of a girl hardly emerged from childhood, placed in such a strange, such an unnatural position. Turning the pages of the little scarlet and gold bound books that record year by year the names of the Dauphine's ladies, it is easy to point to more than one that should never have appeared there at

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all, and to say that this or that owner of thirty-two (or sixty-four) quarterings was unfit to be placed in such a post of trust. Long years afterwards, Marie-Antoinette's words on the subject were recorded by one who, if by no means to be implicitly relied on, gives valuable information when discussing matters within her province. The Queen spoke of those early years, without, however, adding any reflections on the limitations of her whom she had nicknamed "Madame l'Etiquette." The Empress's daughter was probably thinking of the over-anxious care of her own mother, and thence her thoughts had perhaps strayed to the future of the daughter she was not destined to see in her prime, mercifully never to realise the remote possibility of that daughter's cold dislike of herself. "My own dearly-bought experience proved to me that it is impossible to be too particular about the character and qualities of the ladies placed about the person of a young princess. No considerations of rank or favour should influence the choice." She added that she herself attributed many of her own faults and mistakes in early life to a lady of very indifferent character, who she found installed in the Palace and attached to her service on her arrival in France. What it meant in those days and in such an atmosphere as Versailles to deserve the epithet *très légère* seriously applied to any woman, can probably only be gauged by those who are more deeply read in certain memoirs of the day than it is mercifully necessary for the writer of this study to be.

One who knew the world and had drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs made a curious reference to Marie-Antoinette early in the following year:—

> The Dauphine is separated without a rupture from Mesdames, and from those of her ladies she had singled out before without discernment. . . . She turns everybody's

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head, and does what is necessary to achieve that. She treats me notably with the most marked kindness. I do justice to her qualities, but I hold myself aloof from her friendship. In order to deserve the confidence and affection of a princess in such a position one must have a character other than I possess. The Dauphin promises goodness and justice. That is a great deal. . . .

Like most persons possessed of individuality of their own and sufficient strength of mind to pursue a certain line of conduct, Madame d'Egmont made many bitter foes. The so-called "Memoirs of Madame du Barry," spurious for the most part as these are, reveal the hatred felt for Maréchal de Richelieu's daughter by the members of the cabal which he did so much to uphold. She would not see them, would not acknowledge their existence by one bend of a small head, or the merest flicker of haughty eyelids. So long as any faint suspicion remained that the King of Sweden contemplated accepting the bust of du Barry, or presenting her with his own in return, Comtesse d'Egmont refused to have her portrait done by Hall for Comte Creutz to send to Stockholm, or to accept the promised picture of Gustavus as the Chevalier Bayard—*sans peur et sans reproche.* In accents almost of agony she begged his promise that no such interchange as she dreaded was even in contemplation. And it may be added that he gave his word of honour and kept it as a King should do. The painting of a royal knight in armour was finished too late, and was given by the original to Princesse Pignatelli, who, sorrowing over her young stepmother's grave, wrote to the King: "Loaded since my earliest childhood by the goodness of her I shall regret all my life . . . from whom, since I was five years old, I have never been separated until now."

An Englishman belonging to a very old Roman

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Catholic family and with many claims to Comte de Mercy's suffrages, meeting him some years later opined that he was "very starched," by which it is presumed he meant very prim. It is certainly improbable that he found himself often subjected to the particular form of persiflage called in modern parlance "chaff," and we may therefore suppose that he was rather taken aback when, presenting himself at the Dauphine's reception on a Tuesday with the Corps Diplomatique after the party above described, the young lady detached herself from the rest of the ambassadors and said in a low voice :—

"I congratulate you on the good company you were in on Sunday night."

I replied that that occurrence would be followed that same day by a far more remarkable event of which I would give an account to H.R.H.

The Duc d'Aiguillon had appointed seven o'clock at the Château: he came to fetch me, telling me that the King, who had just returned from shooting, was finishing dressing, and the former then conducted me to Madame du Barry, who received me with the most marked attentions. She begged me to sit next to her. The Duc d'Aiguillon then carried off three persons who were present on the pretext of looking at a portrait in the next room. The favourite seized on the occasion to tell me that she was very glad of the King's idea of placing her in a position to make my acquaintance, that she wished to tell me something that had long given her pain, knowing quite well that for a long time past "they" had been occupied in destroying her in the mind of the Dauphine and that with that object they had made her, du Barry, the subject of the most atrocious calumnies, attributing to her personal remarks about H.R.H. the reverse of respectful: while far from having to reproach herself with so enormous a fault, she had always allied herself with those who had justly eulogised the charms of the Archduchess, in spite of the latter having always treated her with rigour and a sort of disdain. She had never allowed herself to make complaints about H.R.H., on the contrary she had always told the King, etc., etc., as when H.R.H. had asked that her household should be paid, etc. I replied to the favourite, professing

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ignorance of any coldness or aversion on the part of the Dauphine, that the character of that princess alienated her from all sentiments of active dislike, and not wishing to enter into more detailed explanations I let it rest there; and the King arrived a moment after by a little staircase terminating in the room where I was sitting.[1]

The private comment to Prince Kaunitz was :—

Although I spend my life here in seeing extraordinary things, I am sometimes unable to represent them to my mind as anything but dreams. I have seen the King with Madame du Barry: she calls him *Monsieur* and treats him like her equal. He quite approves, and even in my presence was not the least embarrassed that his favourite should do so. Monsieur d'Aiguillon has at present no consistency but what is given him by this woman: he governs her less by a marked ascendancy than by attentions, care, and deference.[2]

The report to the Empress then continues :—

Comtesse du Barry then retired, and the King approaching me said: "Hitherto you have been the ambassador of the Empress, now I beg you to be mine, at least for a time." After this he shewed signs of embarrassment: he told me that he had wished to speak to me in private about the Dauphine; he "loved that princess with all his heart, he considered her charming, but being young and lively and having a husband who was not capable of directing her," it was impossible she should avoid snares set by intriguers: knowing that Your Majesty places confidence in me, the King had determined to do the same, with a view to my attending to a subject involving his happiness, and that of the Royal Family.

Comte de Mercy replied that before leaving Vienna two primary rules of conduct had been impressed on the Dauphine, her duty to the King, and to the Dauphin; and he quoted Maria Theresa's words: "Her Majesty knew that she could rely on the King's friendship for herself in the use he would make of his authority over the Archduchess." It is to be hoped that as the Empress laid store by Louis XV.'s friendship he

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Empress Maria Theresa, Sept. 2, 1771.

[2] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Prince Kaunitz, Sept. 2, 1771.

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had other means at his disposal for demonstrating its value. Mercy continued:—

If the Dauphine had diverged in any way from the line of conduct enjoined on her, it was quite involuntary on her part: moreover, if the King would consent to explain his wishes to her in person, he would find the Archduchess only too anxious to please and obey him by every means in her power. "It was repugnant to him to have explanations with his children—would Monsieur de Mercy undertake this on his behalf?" The King added that he was displeased to see that the Dauphine was open to prejudice and to violent dislikes not emanating from herself but "suggested" to her from outside; that no one would wish to control her likes and dislikes, but only to ask of her that she should treat each person who had been presented in the manner to which these were entitled; that different behaviour produced scenes at Court, etc., etc. He repeated several times: "See the Dauphine frequently: I authorize you to say everything you wish to her from me: they give her bad advice, which she should not listen to." He ended with: "By my telling you what I think about my own family you observe my confidence in you." I tried by a few respectful reflections to make the King see how infinitely preferable it would be in every way if he would speak to the Dauphine himself, but he persisted in his resolution, saying, "I will see you from time to time, and I authorize you to say whatever you consider necessary."

In all this long conversation the King had not mentioned du Barry's name, and Comte de Mercy signified in the most delicate manner that he himself should not pronounce it to the Dauphine. The King then called the favourite and the Duc d'Aiguillon, who had been waiting in a kind of passage leading to a dressing-room and who could not have passed the interval very pleasantly with nothing to sit upon. Louis XV. talked on a little about the Emperor, who he was persuaded "liked him very much," which, as he had never seen him, may have been the case; then "vaguely about the Turkish war" and the underhand part attributed to the King of Prussia, whom they seem to have been

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as incapable of keeping out of their conversations as Mr. Dick was of eliminating Charles the First from his memorial. Then Louis XV. departed, saying, "It is late, I am going to supper with my children," leaving the favourite and the Minister to overwhelm the Imperial ambassador with complimentary speeches, which resulted in some cautious replies on procedure, and an assurance to the Empress that although he did not as yet "see clearly the aim of this *petit manège*" he would be only more than ever on his guard after this "singular adventure."

Enlightened on all this to the precise extent that "Mercy" thought advisable, Marie-Antoinette exclaimed at once that the aim and object was to make her speak to Madame du Barry, and asked him to give her his views.

He thought it most important that she should ask the King why he would not signify his wishes to her direct, and should complain gently of his always doing so through third persons. Then, as any true man of the world would have probably done, Comte de Mercy opined that if by her treatment of Madame du Barry the Dauphine allowed the public to see that the part played by that person was known to the young princess, the dignity of the latter absolutely demanded that she should formally request the King to forbid his favourite from appearing in future at the *cercle*, the public games, and similar functions. And thirdly, after a few hours' reflection H.R.H. should make up her mind as to her course of action after she had ascertained the views of the Dauphin, without in any circumstances mentioning the matter to "Mesdames." This, however, unluckily she did, and Madame Adelaide, of course, laid great emphasis on the uselessness of speaking to the King, who would only be embarrassed without

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entering into any explanations. Comte de Mercy pointed out the futility of this form of reasoning, because it could only turn to the advantage of the Dauphine, seeing that the King, in order to avoid being asked for explanations in future, would be more likely to turn a deaf ear to the insinuations of the cabal, who in their turn would be intimidated by finding that the Archduchess was in a position to speak to her grandfather direct.

A "grande promenade" on the donkeys intervening, in which nearly all the Royal Family participated, must have been a relief to some of those concerned.

Within a few days of these occurrences Marie-Antoinette had received a letter from the Empress, here quoted in part:—

I wait impatiently to hear what you say on what Mercy told you from me; I see you have put off this conversation until after the messenger's departure, but what reassures me is that you have already, on his advice, begun to treat the *parti dominant* politely, and even made a few vague remarks that have had a marvellous effect. I will not enlarge on this subject: Mercy is charged to speak out ("de vous parler clair"). . . . I am always assured of your success when you undertake anything, *le bon Dieu* having endowed you with such a face and so many charms that, added to your goodness, must win you all hearts . . . but it comes back to me from all quarters, and too frequently, that you have very much diminished your attentions and politeness in saying something agreeable and suitable to each, and making distinctions. They say you are very negligent on this point, which is attributed to Mesdames, who have never known how to call forth confidence and esteem: but the worst of all is that it is said you notice what is ridiculous and burst out laughing in people's faces: that would, and very rightly too, do you infinite harm and even call the goodness of your heart in question: in order to please five or six young ladies or cavaliers you would lose all the rest. This failing, my dear child, in a princess is not trifling: it results in all the courtiers, generally idle people ("gens désœuvrés") and the least estimable in the Kingdom, following after one to pay court, and drives away honest people who do not wish to be

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ridiculed or expose themselves to annoyances. One finds oneself at the end left with bad companions who entrain one bit by bit into all the vices. It is sometimes said that Germans are not singled out by you: do justice to the real merit of that nation.[1] If you disregard some absurdities in the appearance, or pronunciation, or their mode of doing their hair ("ou à se coiffer"), you would find on the other hand many real talents, of which all foreigners make so much. I can imagine your embarrassment at refusing Broglie about his wife: I cannot deny that I esteem him, as he showed so much zeal on my account in the most critical situation I ever found myself in, after the battle of Prague. . . . All that I hear of the terms you are on together, you four young people, gives me great pleasure: your sister-in-law does you no harm by comparison of faces, but her character is more weighty and her knowledge more extensive. . . . Mercy tells me that the little écritoire I sent you pleased you very much, and that you immediately searched for my windows, saying everything most touching and pretty. Imagine the impression this made on me: do not spoil those depths of feeling and goodness, and do not copy those who have never had any success (notwithstanding their real merit) with the public. This, which was never taught them or shown by example, is natural to you, and you see the marvellous effects. . . .

Vermond was present when the reply was composed and written "by leaps and bounds," and

Madame la Dauphine supposed quite simply that I must know what was said between her and Your Ex. When she had written two lines she inquired:

"What shall I write about all that Monsieur de Mercy told me?"

"First of all it must be ascertained whether Madame la Dauphine is decided to do as he said."

She then proceeded to "scrawl" the letter that follows:—

Madame my very dear Mother, I was enchanted at the arrival of the messenger, having begun to be anxious at the delay. Monsieur de Mercy told me all that Y.M. com-

[1] It is probably unnecessary to remind the reader that Maria Theresa was alluding to her own subjects.

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manded; I think he will be content with my answers and I *hope* Y.M. is persuaded that my greatest pleasure consists in pleasing you. I will also try to treat the Broglies well, although they failed me personally. I am in despair at your placing any reliance on what you hear about my speaking to no one: you must have very little confidence in me to believe that I am so unreasonable as to amuse myself with five or six young people and fail in attentions to those I should distinguish. I am far indeed removed from the ideas Y.M. attributes to me on the Germans: I shall always glory in being one: I recognize in them many good qualities I might desire for those of this country, and as long as good ones come they will be satisfied with the welcome I shall give them. I pity my brother Ferdinand nearing the moment of his departure, knowing by my own experience what it costs to live far from one's family. . . . The Comtesse de Provence is very gentle and gay in private, which she does not seem in public. . Mon. de Mercy was right in saying that the écritoire pleased me so much: it does so every day, and I seem to see you, my dear mamma, in all those houses and apartments.[1] I do not speak to you of all the worries (*tracasseries*) of this country: Mon. de Mercy will certainly tell you what is worth while: as for me I shall mix in them as little as possible. . . .

The next day the ambassador in Paris received another note from Vermond:—

Madame la Dauphine said to me after dinner:

"I must hear you your lesson for Mon. de Mercy: you will tell him that I told my aunts I would speak once to Madame du Barry in his presence, and that I will also talk to the King about what he said of me to Mon. de Mercy: my aunts do not want me to talk to the King because—you know the rest. Try to see him (Mercy) to-day."

I replied that I did not know whether this is possible, because Your Ex. was out shooting. I reiterated the reasons for speaking to the King and got no answer. I added:

"You have then quite decided, Madame, not to speak?"

"Yes, unless Mon. de Mercy is absolutely determined that I should."

This was said without any annoyance. I see the

[1] This writing-table was inlaid with china plaques painted with views of the Imperial palaces—Laxenbourg, Schönbrunn, etc.

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Dauphine does not think it reasonable to refuse Your Ex. and desires you should mention it no more, which is the reason of her haste to make me execute her commission. If Y. Ex. could speak this evening to the Dauphine as if you had not seen me and simply ask if she had talked to the King, matters might advance. . . .

On this Comte de Mercy wrote:—

I see with pain, on this important occasion, as on so many others, that I always experience the same opposition of Madame Adelaide to everything reasonable and useful that I can suggest. I proceeded to Court and for three-quarters of an hour put before the Dauphine the clearest case: I spoke with respect but also with much frankness on Mesdames' line of behaviour. . . . I reiterated the strongest reasons for the Dauphine talking to the King, I repeated that she, in following the same misguided course exposed herself to the same consequences, that the King, being rebuffed by his children's constraint and *géne*, never having experienced pleasure or amenities in their society, was induced to find compensations elsewhere—most vexatious to the State and still more to the family."

The next day, Sunday, the Dauphine attended High Mass in the Parish Church of Compiègne; in the evening she held a *cercle* and was present at the routine *grand couvert*.

Next day she rode, explaining afterwards to Mercy that though the occasion for speaking to the King had not presented itself, she was rehearsing what she intended to say.

The following evening Marie-Antoinette found the ambassador in the rooms of Madame de Noailles, where at Compiègne those long talks generally went on. He enlarged on the King's character, the ease with which the Dauphine might influence him by trying to relieve the boredom from which he suffered, etc.; H.R.H. listened with attention but ended up by saying in all good faith that "her courage failed her altogether, and that she felt she had not strength

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to speak to the King as she had promised a day or two ago." This so exasperated Comte de Mercy that he said if he had the chance he would point out to "Mesdames" what was most pernicious and useless in their advice. He was a bold man. The Dauphine tried to excuse her aunts, but it was impossible to make her reconsider her decision. The next day she went out stag-hunting "in dreadful weather, the rain and mud penetrating the carriages. H.R.H. was not less amused, although she returned wet through. . . ." This was succeeded by a ride in company with Mesdames Adelaide and Sophie, followed by an evening passed in the shut-up stuffy rooms of Madame Victoire, who had a cold. No wonder a drive that entailed getting wet to the skin was considered rather exhilarating than otherwise.

On the 10th Madame du Barry proposed to attend the *cercle* next day with Comtesse de Valentinois, of which, according to promise, Comte de Mercy warned Marie-Antoinette, who assured him she would speak a few words to Madame du Barry provided that he were present, and that at the termination of the game he should approach the favourite and talk to her, when the Archduchess in making the round would stop near him and seize on the occasion to speak to du Barry. H.R.H. said this arrangement was necessary to reassure her, as she felt very frightened. Comte de Mercy observed that if he were left with du Barry while the Archduchess changed her mind again he would appear ridiculous. She seemed hurt at his having any doubts as to her firmness, and he besought her to say nothing to "Mesdames." Unfortunately they discovered what was going on.

Starting to make her round of the circle, the Dauphine whispered to the ambassador that she was "very frightened, but would keep her promise."

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Then, for the first time in public, Comte de Mercy began a conversation with the favourite, on whom all eyes in the crowd were fixed while the Dauphine began her slow progress round the company, making remarks to each great lady or fine gentleman in turn. Closely watched by Madame Adelaide, who was following, Marie-Antoinette approached to within two steps of the Austrian ambassador and his companion standing expectantly by his side. As the Dauphine raised her eyes, the old princess addressed her niece in perfectly audible and rather strident tones:

"It is time we go: we will wait for the King in the rooms of my sister, Victoire."

And sweeping her confused niece before her, Madame Adelaide once again frustrated all Comte de Mercy's elaborately laid plans and proceeded to abuse that gentleman in no measured terms, quite regardless of the Archduchess's feeble protests, until snubbed by Louis-Auguste, who broke in on the clamour in his hoarse squeaky voice:

"*I* think Monsieur de Mercy is right, and that all of you are wrong."

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CHAPTER XIV

DAUPHINE *v.* FAVOURITE

We may pretty well take it for granted that in discussing the influence of the old princesses with their niece by marriage, when writing or speaking to his special friends and colleagues, Comte de Mercy's comments were of a less measured and courtly character than those conveyed by the Embassy messengers to his Sovereign in Austria. He was often wont, too, to address his chief in the following strain—"If only the Dauphine were less frivolous" (he might have added, if only she were half a dozen years older and had had more than a few months' education), "less obstinate in her conduct towards the favourite and would give me a free hand (*et qu'elle voulût me donner un peu de jeu*)" —to all of which the Chancellor replied cynically: "I have read your letter to the Empress. . . . I regard the Dauphine, so long as she does not act by principle and conviction, as a *mauvais payeur* (a bad parter), from whom one must be content to receive whatever one can get."

With all his ability he was wrong: he looked at the question from his own point of view alone. Posterity and even hostile opinion have done Marie-Antoinette this amount of justice, and it is fairly generally acknowledged that a large amount of principle and conviction entered into the conduct of a girl of sixteen, who had the strength of mind

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to place the promptings of an upright nature and a pure mind before the worldly-wise axioms or even the bitter upbraiding of those who were too far off to hear her side of the question. It is most probable that she had been heartily disgusted over du Barry, and had been given particulars of that worthy's behaviour which it would have been impossible for any young girl to write.

To Madame du Barry the ambassador was careful to emphasise the real source of a rebuff that left even her mortified and discouraged—thick-skinned as she was, and accustomed to daily snubs in every shape and form; apart from this, she had no difficulty in hearing the speech for herself, the voice of Madame Adelaide being neither low nor sweet. The King was becoming more and more discontented with the attitude of his daughters, between whom and their late-lamented parent he drew constant and unfavourable comparisons without, of course, any hint of disparagement to the one still so mercifully preserved. Instigated by Mercy, Madame de Noailles plucked up courage to inform the King that, from motives of respect, she must refrain from naming the source of the stream of bad advice poured out without cessation on the youthful Dauphine. Louis le Bien-aimé frowned and looked exceedingly put out:—

"I know that source, and it displeases me very much indeed."

Madame du Barry had arranged a particularly select supper-party—exposed to no such dangers as the fête for three hundred, where money was poured out like water for the entertainment of the fourteen ladies who alone put in an appearance. This supper was fixed for the evening of the day that was to witness the public recognition of Madame du Barry by the future Queen. The ambassadors and that staunch supporter of the hostess and of religion

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and morality—the Papal Nuncio—duly arrived, to find her looking agitated and upset. She had already seen the King, who had cut short a Council in order to hear the result of the meeting at the *cercle* presided over by Marie-Antoinette, and who returned on the termination of the feast in an unmistakably irritable state of mind.

"Well, Monsieur de Mercy," he said crossly, propelling that diplomatist into a corner of the room, "have you seen Madame the Dauphine?" adding quickly, "Your advice bears no fruit—I shall have to come to your assistance." Then, without waiting for the answer with which we may be sure the other was fully prepared, Louis XV. turned to the Chancellor and Prince de Soubise and entered into a long conversation. No course was thus left open to Comte de Mercy but to return sadly enough to his Embassy in Paris, and from there to describe how successful Madame Adelaide had been again in defeating "the best-laid schemes of mice and men." He could not conceal from Maria Theresa, keenly desirous as he was of maintaining happy relations between the Empress and her young daughter, that no good could conceivably result from a situation which no one was less capable of ameliorating than the King himself. The outcome would only consist in increasing coldness, an awkward exhibition of sullen displeasure, and the loss of the little influence the Dauphine had acquired. While the Comtesse de Provence addressed a few remarks to Madame du Barry, who had presented herself at the princess's dinner, the Dauphine had no better reason to give Comte de Mercy for her own silence than fear of her aunts. "These princesses abuse their ascendancy over the Dauphine to such an extent," was Mercy's wind-up of his report, "that very vexatious consequences, impossible to foresee, will always result unless it

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pleases Your Majesty to explain your wishes yourself very firmly and decidedly"; and to Prince Kaunitz on the same day he wrote:—

> There is, I think, nothing but a firm and severe exhortation on the part of the Empress capable of cutting the leading-strings in which Madame Adelaide keeps the Dauphine. All the good qualities of this charming princess are rendered null and void by Mesdames her aunts, who, devoid of principles and reflections, conduct themselves in the most contemptible manner and are the cause of the Archduchess participating in the ill effects.

The Chancellor replied by a compliment on his friend's patience, "so far exceeding his own," and it is not hard to perceive how highly the latter was tried by the dearth of any good or reliable influence on the spot. With the single exception of the Abbé, he seems to have had no one, in a position to see Marie-Antoinette daily, on whose good sense and discretion he could rely. Under these conditions it is perhaps not surprising that he resolutely invoked the one voice to which he knew the wilful little Dauphine would never turn a deaf ear. His account excited the Empress far beyond the bounds of prudence, and perhaps Prince Kaunitz helped her to ignore the enormous difference in their perspective at a distance and that of one on the spot, who heard and saw what went on under her indignant eyes.

The Empress, however, realised on this occasion, if she did not always do so, that her letter was "un peu fort," and she sent it to the ambassador with power to suppress it if he thought fit. This, however, he apparently did not do, saying he had not hesitated to present it because there was no time to lose in remedying an ill that had already taken deep root; in fact, it would be necessary for Her Majesty to keep up a tone of authority which alone could wean the Dauphine from Madame Adelaide's

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pernicious opinions. The Archduchess was at her toilette—it was at Fontainebleau; she read the letter quickly and seemed deeply impressed; but, added the ambassador with his invincible honesty, the impression was not quite satisfactory, the few words she spoke indicating more impatience than docility or conviction, and he felt almost certain what her answer would be. It seems a pity that he did not remind Maria Theresa more often of a truth that he and Vermond realised even more fully ere long, namely, that an appeal to the girl's feelings would bring about what no amount of unrelieved condemnation could achieve. The Empress thought that after disregarding Mercy so flagrantly Marie-Antoinette required to be "awaked from her lethargy." No one could say that the exordium partook of any of the qualities of a soporific:—

This fear and embarrassment about speaking to the King, *the best of fathers*,[1] or about speaking to people to whom you have been advised to talk! Own this fear of even saying good-morning: a word on a dress, a bagatelle, costs you so many grimaces, pure grimaces—or worse. You have, then, allowed yourself to be led into such slavery that reason, your duty even, is no longer sufficient to convince you. I cannot be quiet after the conversation of Mercy and all that he has told you of the King's wishes and your own duty: you have had the temerity to fail him, and what good reason can you allege? None. You should neither see nor know the Barry from any other point of view than that of a lady admitted to court and to the society of the King. . . . If one exacted from you basenesses and familiarities, neither I, nor anyone else, could advise you thus: but an indifferent word, a look . . . All through a shameful complaisance for people who subjugate you by treating you as a child, providing you with rides on horseback, on donkeys, with children and dogs; these are the great causes that win your attachment . . . and in the long run will render you ridiculous, and make you neither loved nor esteemed. You tell me that for love of me you will treat the Broglies well although they 'have failed you personally': there, again, is a fallacy and from the same source.

[1] The italics are my own.

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"How is it possible," inquired the writer superbly, from those Imperial heights from which no one stooped more effectually than she when occasion demanded—"how is it possible that *un petit* Broglie can fail you? I do not understand it. Never has anyone failed me, or your *ten* brothers and sisters," continued the Empress, losing count of her own children in her indignation at the bare idea:—

> If he has displeased a member of your suite you ought to know nothing about it—still less take it to yourself. It is quite sufficient for you that the Broglies are esteemed by the King: and you must not listen, or act, or even think otherwise. You began so well. Your face, your judgment (when not directed by others) is always true and of the best. Allow yourself to be led by Mercy: what interest can he and I have but your sole welfare, and the good of the State? It is for you to give the tone after the King, and not to be led like a child. . . .

And so on, and so on—all so true and admirable, but alas! so harsh and unjust in view of the circumstances—ending with:—

> One must know how to play one's part if one desires to be esteemed; you can if you like to give yourself a little trouble, and follow the advice given you: if you let yourself go I foresee great troubles. . . . I conjure you to believe the opinion of a mother who knows the world, who idolises her children and who only wishes to pass her sad days in being of use to them. . . . I embrace you tenderly, do not think me vexed.

It would have been hard to think otherwise. In addition to the terms employed being far too severe to address to any one so young and so far away from all the associations of her childhood, this letter followed one previously quoted, to which the poor child had already taken exception. She always opened the Empress's letters without waiting a moment, and Comte de Mercy discerned "much emotion" as she read out to him the sentence

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on her diminution of politeness and attention, and protested against the injustice of the accusations, especially that of laughing at people. She ended by observing that Comte de Broglie had *manqué* by showing the reply which she had sent when the Duchesse de Boufflers solicited the succession of her place as lady of the palace for her sister, Madame de Broglie. The ambassador had ascertained that Comte de Broglie had committed the strange breach of etiquette of passing on the refusal to his brother the Bishop of Noyon, at Compiègne, who had handed it about all round! It is difficult to believe how sensible people can have behaved so badly. Why any one should ask for such places unless they were offered, and why her suite left the Dauphine to reply in person to these importunities (Comtesse de Narbonne had dictated the answer and apparently done it very ill), all seems inexplicable.

Comte de Mercy had a long talk with his charge, in which he spoke more openly than he had ever done before on the vexed question of the aunts, even pointing out how little importance was to be attributed to their likes and dislikes, and citing the case of Madame de Pompadour, to whom, after hating her for years, Madame Adelaide had paid the amazing compliment of gushing violently over her, and requesting her to choose her a new Confessor! No wonder those who knew the princesses called them a "mixture of levity and weakness." He did not attempt to disguise that owing to the horrible disorders of the Court the situation of the Royal Family was painful and difficult, but pointed out "the necessity of putting up with what one cannot alter," etc.; he added that the Dauphine seemed "very pensive" when he left her, and remained thoughtful ("fort rêveuse") for days after.

Besides the Broglie contretemps, she had had a

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number of small worries, one of which was that Princess Charlotte, her aunt, had persuaded the Empress to request that a Comtesse de Bussy might be presented at Versailles. This was a Mademoiselle de Messey, a relation of the Choiseuls, married to the most brilliant of the lieutenants of that heroic Dupleix of whom France may well be proud. But although Marie-Antoinette herself asked the King direct to sanction the presentation, it was definitely refused, on the pretext that Monsieur de Bussy before his migration to India was "pas gentilhomme."

Meanwhile the Dauphine had composed the following letter to the Empress, without any help from the Abbé:—

13 *Oct.* 1771.—. . . I am in despair at your believing all the falsehoods that reach you from here, in preference to what Mercy and I can tell you. You believe, then, that we want to take you in? I have many reasons for thinking that the King himself has no wish that I should speak to la Barry: besides his never having mentioned her to me, he is more attentive to me since he knows that I refused, and if, like me, you were in a position to see all that goes on here, you would think that this woman and her clique would never be content with a word—it would always be beginning again. . . . You can be certain that I shall never require guiding by anybody in whatever relates to honourable conduct. As to the Broglies, if you were better informed, my dear mamma, you would know that "un petit Broglie" fails here as he could not do at Vienna. I wrote as nicely as possible to Madame de Boufflers that the King could not grant her request: the Broglies thought proper to turn my letter into ridicule and to give copies; that is not a fallacy regarding a member of my suite. In order to show you the injustice of la Barry's friends I must tell you that I talked to her at Marly: I don't say that I will never speak, but I cannot undertake to do so on any given day and hour so that she may talk of it triumphantly beforehand. I beg your pardon for writing to you so decidedly. . . . If you saw the pain that your dear letter gave me you would excuse my expressions, and believe that, at this moment as

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in all my life, I am filled by the most vivid tenderness and respectful submission for my dear mamma.

Those who think that Marie-Antoinette possessed little character cannot deny that this letter, written as it was without help and in the utmost haste and agitation, tends to prove the contrary. She was greatly perturbed after she had sent it, and was proportionately relieved, said the Abbé, at the tone of the reply, which contained good wishes for her birthday, slightly less moving, perhaps, than that of the previous year, when her mother had written to "you who for fifteen years have given me nothing but happiness." Unlike a large number of persons who hit hard and have no idea of a blow being struck in return, the Empress was too just not to recognise a genuine grievance :—

I was not displeased at your defending yourself indignantly. . . . All that proves your candour and sensibility is dear to me, but ask yourself whether it was not caused rather by impatience than by regret at my remonstrances.

If we made the mistake of considering the Empress in her maternal relations only from the point of view of considerations affecting her youngest daughter, many of these letters would be incomprehensible, addressed from a great distance to one who was so lonely in a splendid crowd, so unprotected in circumstances of extreme difficulty, so unfitted to battle single-handed with the world. But in real life and out of the region of novels, is there ever such a thing as a free mind bearing uninfluenced on any event however critical? Probably fewer mistakes would be made if there were. Too often, by no conscious volition of our own, some extraneous circumstance influences an opinion, colours a speech, or determines an action. Still more often some past and gone experience that went sharp and straight as a two-edged sword to

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some vital part and left enduring scars, arises like a pale spectre to bid us beware how we wend our way. It is probably at those times that our judgment is most likely to incline to a course diametrically opposite to that in which concealed danger once lay, for then we fail to take the difference of time and circumstances into sufficient account, the diversity of characters, and last but not least the radical changes in ourselves.

An inclination to err on the side of severity, natural to the Empress in her relations with her large family, was undoubtedly strengthened at this moment by the proceedings of the Archduchess Marie-Amélie, who was taking an increasingly active part in the disorders at Parma. The Infante and Infanta had broken their promise to the Kings of Spain and France to leave du Tillot, Marquis de Felino, a free hand to remedy disorders, and though the Empress reminded her daughter that "the word of princes should be sacred," the Minister was forced to resign. He was replaced by Don Llano, Marquis de Zuvero, and the trouble rapidly increased, possibly fomented by Comte de Boisgelin, the Archduchess's devoted admirer, denominated "that fire-eater" by the young lady's mother, who ended by despatching Wolfgang, Comte Rosenberg, as a special envoy. A trusted servant of the Empress and devoted to the Imperial children since their earliest infancy, he found himself disregarded by Marie-Amélie, and had no alternative but to return to await the orders of the Empress at Milan, where he fell ill, according to her, from worry and vexation. She then took the extreme step of returning all letters to Parma unopened, ordering "my family here (Vienna) and at Florence and Milan" to do the same. "I thought it necessary . . . knowing the wilfulness of my daughter, but notwithstanding the great pain she gives me she is

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nevertheless my child. I do not wish to drive her to extremity." The Empress made no secret to Comte de Mercy about her inmost feelings. "So much consolation as I find in Naples, Versailles, Florence and Milan," she said, alluding in rotation to those she loved best, "equal grief has been caused me by that daughter from the moment of her departure." But next year Maria Theresa showed a strong desire to resume relations on account of the precarious health of a peacemaker in the form of "a charming little grand-daughter," whose mother disregarded the faculty and adopted her own measures. The Empress sighed over "obstinacy and temper" and "her pretending to be a doctor," but although the Archduchess refused to allow the poor baby enough to eat she may claim some credit for "insisting on opening the windows," to the horror of her own doctor and of Störck, the Empress's physician, forestalling the modern treatment of consumption by that enlightened proceeding. "If I had a Mercy there," wrote the Empress to that faithful servant when affairs in Parma reached an *impasse*, "I might still hope, but in the present condition of things there is nothing to be done."

Comte de Mercy was careful to impress on the Empress that he himself was quite impervious to du Barry's vulgar charms, while his own tone of "sincerity and frankness, to which she is quite unaccustomed" — or he either, for that matter, in such a scene as Versailles—had had the effect of inspiring her with confidence, which, joined to her natural levity, enabled him to glean "some extraordinary particulars. She is very vain and volatile, not clever, but neither malicious nor vindictive. It is very easy to get her to talk, and in many circumstances I derive advantages from her indiscretions." These were not, however, of a nature

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to be unfolded to the Empress, and were only revealed in part to Kaunitz:—

> Madame du Barry has a fairly good address, but her language strongly suggests her former state of life. She has little wit—much sensibility on all the points that concern women of her kind . . . By knowing how to take her it is very easy to make her talk, and one could derive great advantages on many occasions. This is no doubt the reason why Madame du Barry is watched over by her sister-in-law, who is very deep and quite devoted to Monsieur d'Aiguillon. Her (du Barry's) sole desire is that Madame the Dauphine should speak once to her—and in order to enlist my interest she wished to have two interviews with me, during which she used her authority to get rid of her *surveillante* . . . She was very pleased with me, without my having made her any promises whatever, and, through gratitude, she related with inconceivable levity the history of her establishment at Court, what she knows of the King's character, the means she employs to dissipate his *ennui*, and, in short, what she thinks of a number of courtiers.

Deftly manipulated, the silly adventuress handed over for Comte de Mercy's inspection an ungrammatical, disjointed scribble sent to her by the King, who, even in her case, kept to his strange fondness for signifying his wishes in writing to those he saw several times a day. The odd letter in question would be irrelevant in these pages: the King expressed his conviction that "Mesdames," as he called his daughters, would act on a distinct order to treat Madame du Barry better, but they would obey with the worst possible grace. He was tired of the melancholy and *gêne* brought by their presence in his *petits voyages*—what might be described as his semi-official moves—he thought the best plan would be to "exclude these princesses" and to invite the Dauphine and Comtesse de Provence: would Madame du Barry think this over and let His Majesty hear the result of her reflections? He added, with an evident feeling of legitimate injury, that "the late Queen, although

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she was extremely pious, never behaved so," etc. "I was sufficiently struck by this singular letter," said Comte de Mercy, who does not appear to have been any more impressed by du Barry's great beauty than Mr. Walpole of Strawberry Hill. The ambassador never made the smallest allusion to her looks.

Many years later Comte de Mercy told an intimate friend, an Englishman, that after his first talk with the King, Louis XV. acquired the habit of glancing round the rooms at Madame du Barry's visitors, observing, "I do not see Monsieur de Mercy." After a few such occasions the Austrian ambassador was invariably invited to the favourite's parties—verbally when the Court was at Versailles, and at other times by means of small perfumed notes sent by special messenger to the Petit Luxembourg. Mr. Quintin Crauford, to whom Comte de Mercy related this, added that the King was much displeased at the Dauphine's resistance to any plan for receiving the visits of Madame du Barry, and proposed to Comte de Mercy to reason with Marie-Antoinette. The astute diplomatist played a trump card without a second's delay.

"If Your Majesty will dictate what I should say to Madame the Dauphine, I shall have the honour to make the communication on Your Majesty's behalf."

"No, no," said the King hurriedly, much embarrassed by the suggestion, "I do not wish you to say anything at all *from me*."

Even from the point of view of her own interests du Barry seems to have had odd notions of effacing herself. Later on she ordered the construction of a pavilion at Fontainebleau commanding a private garden hitherto strictly reserved for the use of the Royal Family—a proceeding which elicited heated complaints of "impertinence" from the

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Archduchess to her mother's ambassador. That, however, may have been less unpleasant than a reminder of Madame du Barry's presence at Versailles, where the princesses used to steal hasty glances at a row of golden shutters overhead, before starting for their drives. One spring afternoon the Dauphine and Comtesse de Provence, when leaving the rooms of Madame Victoire, stopped for a moment to look at a sundial let into the wall of a little court. Without any warning a considerable amount of water fell plump on the two girls' heads.[1]

"See, Papa," exclaimed Marie-Antoinette, bursting in on the astonished King, "what one is exposed to when passing under your windows! You really ought to keep more order."

Unaccustomed to interrogations of any kind, and much taken aback, Louis XV. inquired from whence the offending missile had been directed.

"It was from *chez vous*," said the Dauphine, prudently using the expression with which they all indicated their special sets of apartments—what Mr. Pepys used to call the "lodgings," at Whitehall. Quite at a loss for an answer, although he could not fail to guess in what direction she was pointing, the King showered caresses on his grand-daughter, vaguely promising that a reprimand should be administered to the offender. There is little reason to suppose that any servant of Madame du Barry heard more of a matter which the Dauphine, probably under expert advice, had the good sense to turn into a joke.

That advice, however, was not likely to come from Madame de Noailles, who, excellent as she was, did not show more capacity in her post as

[1] Long ago I was told by two ancient Scottish ladies that within the memory of old people whom they had known, the dwellers in the tall houses in Edinburgh "closes" used to project soapsuds into the street beneath, warning unwary pedestrians by a cry that sounded like "Gairyl'o!" (*Gare à l'eau*).

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time went on, or acquire any more influence over her charge. "Mesdames" urged on their niece the advisability of addressing the King through themselves alone, and further suggested that the Dauphine should ask him whether or no "Madame de Noailles was placed about her person in the capacity of a governess"—one of those *vilains projets* which it was the daily occupation of Comte de Mercy to frustrate. In virtue of her position, Madame de Noailles gave constant balls and suppers to the Royal Family, at one of which a much-rehearsed *contredanse* formed the letters of the Christian name of the Dauphine, who on account of a cold withdrew at three o'clock, the Comte and Comtesse de Provence remaining until six in the morning. A little later Madame Clothilde had weekly concerts in her apartments at which the Dauphine was one of the performers, despite "Mesdames," who were filled with hatred of Madame de Marsan, under whose direction these little festivities were arranged. The "Governess of the Children of France" subordinated her dislike of the poor Dauphine to her own consciousness of the advisability of worshipping the rising sun. She inaugurated a fête in Marie-Antoinette's honour which Comte de Mercy described as *très galante*, though he commenced with a proverb "Il vaut mieux tard que jamais"—"Better late than never." The performers appeared in the picturesque costumes worn by the various subjects of the Empress-Queen—Austrian, Hungarian, Bohemian, Flemish, etc.—making speeches in praise of their Sovereign and her daughter. This was followed by a ball, and that in its turn resulted in the little *tracasseries* "which happen here in everything," said Comte de Mercy, who was tired of enacting the ticklish part of go-between in so many quarrels and misunderstandings. On this occasion several

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members of the suites of the Dauphine and the princesses complained of being left out, and Madame de Noailles exhibited a good deal of displeasure for which no definite cause could be assigned. She had not long since had a serious disagreement with the Duc de Noailles, Prince de Soubise and the Duc d'Aiguillon over the admittance of Gardes du Corps and others in uniform to the Dauphine's dinner, and the Imperial ambassador found a heated altercation going on and devoted his mind to smoothing everybody down. He did not even show Madame de Noailles the letter from the Empress intended for that lady; and when, in defiance of strict etiquette, the audience in the Court theatre clapped vigorously at the mention of the Dauphine's name, it was Vermond who was deputed to remind her to make charming speeches of acknowledgment to the Duc d'Aumont and his daughter, the Duchesse de Villeroi.

Madame de Noailles's worst mistake concerned that Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon who had married Louis-Auguste and his bride. The latter had endorsed the request of the Abbé du Chastel (Almoner to the late Queen and now to the Dauphine) addressed to the Cardinal, who dawdled for eight months and then fulfilled the Dauphine's wishes very inadequately. When at last he went to inform her what he had done, she said gravely:

"Monsieur the Cardinal, I am much obliged to you, but I hope that another time you will not keep me waiting so long."

The Archbishop, although "quite in the wrong, thought himself ill-treated" by this reply, and going off to his great friend Madame de Noailles, asked her to inform the Dauphine that he should not reappear to receive her further orders until he was sent for. Recounting the affair, Comte de Mercy wrote:—

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Madame de Noailles having been ill-advised enough to execute so improper a commission, the Archduchess was naturally much offended, and replied that she could very well do without seeing the Cardinal, and that when she had a similar request to make in future she would go straight to the King. The prelate and the Comtesse were in great consternation at this firm reply, which they had not in the least expected, and applied to me, as nearly always happens here when a false move has been made. I made the Cardinal see that he had been wrong in the way he had executed the order, and still more so in the terms in which he had complained of H.R.H., while the Comtesse on her side had committed a great mistake.

Comte de Mercy then interceded for the delinquents, but the Dauphine adhered to her intention not to address a single word to the Cardinal the first time he presented himself before her.

Like his Empress, who wrote that she was "née malheureuse," and who suffered from the low spirits consequent on an over-burdened mind and a constant sense of overwhelming responsibility, Comte de Mercy also had moments of extreme depression, due, probably, to a large extent to delicate health. Towards the end of the year he wrote sadly about his own "feeble ideas and reflections" contrasted with the "high lights" of Maria Theresa, adding "it is probable that, if the Archduchess would reflect a little and would lend herself to circumstances, look to the future and furnish me with the means for taking action, I might succeed in preventing the favourite serving as the instrument of many pernicious actions, and by this means diminish her dependence on the Duc d'Aiguillon." It may be remembered that Comte de Mercy had had the Duc d'Aiguillon under close observation ever since the latter's appointment, and the intervening months had done nothing to reassure the Empress's representative on the subject either of

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the talents or still less of the personal qualities of the Minister. "It is some time since I commenced to unravel (*à démêler*) the character of the Duc d'Aiguillon, and to discover indications of duplicity that arrest my attention. . . . He is at the feet of the favourite because the King cannot get accustomed to him, and takes offence at everything. . . ." A few weeks later the quiet observer had arrived at a disastrous if a just conclusion: "Without any real knowledge of affairs of State he gropes in obscurity"—the French expression he used is much more graphic, "Sans connaissance fondée des affaires d'Etat il chemine dans les ténèbres." "In fact," concluded Comte de Mercy, "he daily announces himself under traits of a blackness that make one tremble," which, it must be confessed, did not sound precisely hopeful.

Comte de Mercy further begged the Archduchess not to "ill-treat" the favourite, who proposed to exercise her right, from having been presented in form, of appearing in company with two friends, the Duchesse d'Aiguillon and Maréchale de Mirepoix at the New Year's Day reception by the Royal Family. He had the consolation of hearing that the visit went off well. First addressing the Duchesse, the Dauphine passed before du Barry, and, regarding her "without *gêne* or affectation," remarked: "There are a great many people at Versailles to-day"—a historic speech, promptly reported by the Corps Diplomatique to their own countries. Obeying a sign from the Dauphine to follow her to her apartments from the dreary scene of her public dinner, Comte de Mercy was thus accosted the moment the door was shut:

"I have taken your advice, and here is Monsieur le Dauphin, who will testify to my conduct."

The prince smiled without speaking, while the

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young lady related what had occurred, winding up her story with :

"I have spoken once, but I am determined to let it rest there, and that woman shan't hear the sound of my voice again."

This was the first time in eighteen months that Comte de Mercy had had the opportunity of speaking at any length before the Dauphin, and, concealing his dismay at this untoward turn of events, the ambassador seized on an excellent opportunity to improve the occasion. With his usual address, he interspersed a few compliments with his views on the critical nature of the present situation, the Dauphin applauding in dumb show, by nodding his head and simulated clapping of hands. The narrator was fain to admit that his special charge took the matter more lightly, and, considering how easily she was moved to mirth, there is every reason to fear that she laughed with what a popular contemporary author would call "the deplorable levity" of fifteen. She was exceedingly pleased with herself, and her first letter in January, 1772, evidently written in high spirits, began :—

Madame, my very dear mother, I have no doubt that Mercy has told you of my conduct on New Year's Day, and I hope you will have been satisfied. You can truly believe that I always sacrifice my prejudices and repugnances as long as I am asked to do nothing too remarkable, or dishonourable.

And in discussing a letter from the Empress she showed "a great deal of joy," exclaiming, "For this once I am not scolded any more, and the Empress begins to see that I cannot change my behaviour towards the favourite."

Alas, Maria Theresa suffered from the disadvantages inseparable from the minority in this world who are daily dealing with matters of the

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utmost weight and importance, and who are continually facing momentous questions. She was too over-worked, and perhaps also by nature too serious, to handle a very high-spirited young creature with an adequately delicate touch. She remorselessly used the curb, and if the two-year-old dutifully bent its head instead of throwing it up and bolting altogether, a close observer on the spot might have detected the danger of continuing a practice fraught with peril, there being no guarantee of unfailing submission in the future. Comte de Mercy did ample justice to Marie-Antoinette's love for her mother, but he perhaps failed to recognise that the meek reception of the scoldings was due to that affection alone, and not to any conviction of the justice of the admonition and blame, or perception of the vital interests at stake.

Haunted by fears of the King's impending break-up, by the "violent crisis and great disorder of the affairs of the kingdom" (of France), by the advent of an ambassador she thoroughly disliked, the Empress took life as a whole in too deadly earnest to be capable of appreciating the advisably lighter side of a situation. She rose at the fatal word "dishonour" as a thoroughbred horse responds to a hint of the spur:—

VIENNA, *13th February*, 1772.—I send you on this separate sheet through Mercy my reply to yours of 21st Jan., where you tell me how you acquitted yourself on New Year's Day by following my advice. The effect proved that this advice was good: and you made me laugh by imagining that I or my Minister could ever give you counsels *against honour*—or even against the least decency. See by these traits how prejudices and bad advice have taken possession of your mind. Your agitation after those few words, the suggestion not to repeat them, make one tremble for you. What interest can I have but your good, the interests of your dominions, the happiness of the Dauphin and your own, the critical situation in which you and the entire

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Kingdom and family are placed. . . ? Who can give you better advice, better merit your confidence than my Minister, who knows *à fond* both the State and the instruments by which it is worked? He has no more engrossing object than, I may add, the sole one of your welfare . . . it requires all the talents, all the attachment of Mercy to render him so useful and necessary to you. . . .

No wonder that the conscientious mentor frequently reported that the girl read and spoke of these letters with tears in her eyes. How often, overweighted by the cares of statecraft and of three kingdoms, the Empress wounded to the very quick the sensitive nature of her affectionate, warm-hearted child! Like a large number of strong-minded, scrupulous people who compose with great facility, and whose work obliges them to direct a vast correspondence against time, it is quite possible that she never guessed how harshly her letters read. Still less, mercifully enough, did she ever divine how those same letters would be preserved and used in days to come against the very child she so dearly loved.

It is not surprising that on perusing the foregoing letter the poor little princess seemed, as Comte de Mercy wrote, "much affected and thought at first that she was experiencing a reprimand. H.R.H. read me out a great part of the letter, and taking it bit by bit, I observed that Your Majesty was not scolding, but that the effects of extreme tenderness," etc. Seldom had the ambassador's diplomatic talents shone more conspicuously, but this time the wound was deeper, and it required all his tact and much of his time before his wise and gentle reasoning achieved its object. The Empress did full justice to the efforts of her trusted envoy, but was amazed that such erroneous ideas could enter the head of any one connected with herself:—

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You did well to reassure her with regard to the contents of my confidential letter: it is in the nature of my children to think they are being scolded directly they are given heartfelt advice as to their behaviour.

The Empress was convinced that she understood their characters. "In spite of the inconveniences I still find in the Dauphine's conduct," she said in alluding to some innocent amusements, "I must touch lightly on that particular note. I know my children; to try to preach to them is more calculated to upset than to correct them." Such reflections generally preceded or accompanied some scorching remarks. When the elaborate precautions to veil the sources of her information in mystery seemed in danger of breaking down, the Empress was specially severe:—

I shall impress on her all the benefits of more frequent conversations with you, viewed (as these are) with pleasure and approval by the King, but I do not consider it *à propos* at present to add a few words on her amusements with children, in order to avoid exciting suspicions of you—sentiments to which my children are only too much inclined.

It would be difficult for the ordinary reader to avoid thinking that the Imperial children were not so very unreasonable after all, if they were occasionally under the impression that they were being reproved. Their mother's methods were of the Spartan order—she acknowledged it in general terms herself—and to do her justice, her favourites shared with others the same amount of blame expressed in a similarly uncompromising manner. Perhaps those whose absent faces filled a greater part of her heart were objects of a larger share of the anxious solicitude and the judgment that indicated dangers and possibilities often underestimated by a less trained observer. But if she was inclined to err on the side of over-severity amounting to injustice, she undoubtedly knew how to inculcate

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and preserve the priceless qualities of love and respect. All the follies of youth, the wretched surroundings and the evil examples never sullied, even temporarily, the brightness of Marie-Antoinette's intense affection and unbounded respect for the severe parent she regarded with an equal mixture of awe and admiration.

The following little incident occurred about this time, and is rather differently told by Comte de Mercy and Vermond: as the latter was evidently present, for he speaks of "not keeping Your Excellency's messenger waiting," and the other was in Paris, the Abbé's account is given. Madame de Noailles had issued the necessary orders for an audience by the Dauphine of the Archbishop of Rheims on receiving a Cardinal's hat. Monsieur d'Aiguillon, who presented him, asked Madame de Noailles how long it was since the Dauphine had heard from her family. The reply was "three days." He at once volunteered the information that the Empress "had been bled a second time but was better"—which, considering the remedy, was rather surprising. The Archduchess showed plainly that she knew nothing, and the Duke tried to enter into explanations that were not even heard. The Cardinal arriving at that moment, "she made a great effort and got through remarkably well," but the moment he was gone she burst into floods of tears and left the room, murmuring that she could not give any more audiences. It is satisfactory to know that Louis-Auguste "showed considerable feeling," while Madame de Noailles went herself to get from Aiguillon a copy of the letter, which seemed to the anxious Dauphine more favourable than the verbal account she had heard. Everybody condemned his imprudence in not ascertaining first what she knew. Shortly after-

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wards, the following little note[1] reached the Embassy in Paris :—

Monsieur d'Aiguillon has just told me that the Empress has been bled twice. I beg you to give me news of her at once. ANTOINETTE.

Officially called upon for an explanation, the Minister sent on a note from the *chargé d'affaires* at Vienna, to the effect that the Empress had been kept in her room for eight days by "a swelling in her left cheek, and great oppression ; she had been bled twice and was without fever," while that injured innocent, Aiguillon, added :—

Madame the Dauphine need have felt no anxiety had she listened to, or believed me ; but she did neither the one nor the other, and I have been accused of committing an *étourderie*, etc. I even added that Prince Louis had informed me that on the 11th he was to have an audience, but all my attentions only resulted in my committing fresh faults. . . .

Vermond thought he was sincere for once ; and said that Comte de Mercy's letter had been very reassuring, but that if there were any bad or doubtful news to give, he would beg the ambassador to bring it to Versailles himself. The Dauphine only felt depressed and had a pain in her eyes. The following postscript was added later :—

I open my letter while Madame the Dauphine is getting up. I have just seen her take two cups of chocolate, she slept well and is recovered, besides feeling all your attentions, and is occupied with the uneasiness her note may have given you, written in the first moment of pain.

The Prince Louis above alluded to was giving Maria Theresa more anxiety than any bodily ill was likely to cause her. His reputation had preceded him, and no claim to shining talents could be alleged in extenuation of so unsuitable a selection. The Empress wrote to Comte de Mercy :—

[1] The Dauphine wrote "saignez" for "saignée."

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I have every reason to be dissatisfied with the choice that France has made of such a *mauvais sujet* as the Coadjutor of Strasbourg for the Embassy here. I might have refused him had I not been restrained by considerations of the disagreeables that may react on my daughter; but you will not fail to point out to the Court of France that they will do well to recommend to this ambassador serious conduct suitable to his profession and the post he will occupy—and that, moreover, I shall not be in the humour to tolerate the divagations and scandals to which he may incline—I own to you I fear our women here.

Comte de Mercy gave the ambassador-designate the benefit of a great deal of advice, which, had the latter been less hopelessly vain, frivolous and unstable, might have done him considerable good. To the Empress he wrote:—

The minister himself (Aiguillon) feels that the choice is very misplaced. I hope the Coadjutor may succeed in regulating his behaviour: he has a sufficiently amiable and attractive appearance, but they attribute to him a character full of levity, unreliable, and with a great inclination to intrigue—there seems no doubt of this.

And to Prince Kaunitz he added:—

I have had several conversations, in which I kept to the tone suitable for the preparation of his mission. He replied by pretty speeches, and appeared to me to be as frivolous as ignorant of all he ought to know.

Nephew of Prince de Soubise and Comtesse de Marsan, the Coadjutor claimed direct descent from various Kings of France through Anne of Brittany, "the little duchess in wooden shoes" who married Charles VIII., from the Valois François Premier and the Bourbon Henri Quatre, whose respective grandmothers were Rohans. That family allied their pretensions to those of scions of the once reigning Dukes of Lorraine, demanding as a right an intermediate place between Princes of the Blood

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Royal and the flower of the nobility of France, or, as their motto expressed it:—

Roi ne veux,
Prince ne daigne,
Rohan suis.

Unfortunately, however well founded they might be, such claims to consideration were quite insufficient in themselves to satisfy the Empress as to the suitability of an envoy who proposed to represent all-important interests in such critical times. Throughout the Empire want and misery due to bad seasons and insufficient crops were causing keen anxiety. The removal of large bodies of troops from the Low Countries to Italy was a ruinous if precautionary measure reluctantly concurred in by Maria Theresa, who, as she said, "had no opinion of this costly ostentation," initiated by her military advisers with the Emperor at their head. Two past wars with Russia lent added bitterness to the possibilities of a fresh outbreak of hostilities with Frederick the Great. "The confusion in which you are makes one shudder," she wrote; "our situation is not smiling either."

Prince Louis had used all the influence of which he was possessed to wring a reluctant consent from the King, who, unmindful of old promises, revoked the appointment of Baron de Breteuil on the eve of his departure, and relegated that aggrieved diplomatist to Naples. "I am outraged," wrote Prince Kaunitz, "at, among other things, the iniquities that are suffered by Baron de Breteuil: truly they belong to the number of those that must be seen to be believed." The Chancellor had less cause perhaps to regret the supersession of the able *chargé d'affaires*, Durand (de Distroff), often described in English works as ambassador to Vienna, whose coat of arms was far too modest to

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permit his aspiring to a post for which Louis XV. considered that birth rather than brains should qualify a candidate. Monsieur Durand's mental qualifications brought him repeatedly into close quarters with Kaunitz, and he was an object of suspicion to the Empress, who was well aware that he was an active and trusted agent of the spy system of her ally. "I have had this letter from Broglio to Durand quickly copied," she wrote to Mercy, "you see how this correspondence is kept up—it was all in cipher." On the 19th of January, 1772, the Coadjutor-Bishop had his first audience. The Empress dictated a detailed account to Baron Neny for the information of her ambassador in Paris, who said he could see that the Coadjutor was "preparing to don the mantle of hypocrisy," and thought "his natural petulance would get the better of him before long."

To the Bishop's request for a favourable hearing and future indulgence (the grounds for which were not stated), the Empress replied rather coldly that to the best of her belief his predecessors had had every reason to be satisfied with their sojourn at her Court —enumerating one by one Hautefort, Choiseul, Praslin, du Châtelet, Durfort, and adding in a parenthesis after the second "whom I shall never forget." She noticed that the Bishop smilingly repeated in a soft voice "Que je n'oublierai jamais," but as she made no remark the subject naturally dropped. He, however, sent a very distorted report to Paris, and the Duc de Noailles warned Mercy that Soubise and Madame de Marsan were making all the capital they could out of this reference to the exiled Minister. "He spoke to me again of my daughter," continued the Empress, "praising her, but hinting that she had not got about her those who were capable of advising her for her good." Knowing that there was a great

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deal more behind, the Empress answered cautiously to the effect that the material was excellent, and that the result depended on the uses that were made of opportunities in France—an unanswerable argument, every word ringing as true and sound as the strokes of a well-directed hammer on an anvil. Alas! that they were thrown away on him to whom they were addressed. Those prophetic utterances may have come back to Louis de Rohan in the later, more peaceful years of his life when, as his apologists declare, his better nature asserted itself, long after the catastrophe he had done so much to precipitate had come to pass, and the fair head he had heaped with calumny was laid low in the dust.

The Empress soon satisfied herself of his unsuitability for his post, and never willingly did she mention to him again the dear name of her child.

Two months later she had relegated him to a place in her estimation from which he only sank lower as time went on :—

> The Prince de Rohan displeases me more and more: he is a very *mauvais sujet*, without talents, prudence, or morals, sustaining very ill the character of Minister and ecclesiastic. The Emperor likes to amuse himself with him, it is true; but it is to elicit stupidities, nonsense, and *turlupinades*. Kaunitz is pleased with him, because he gives him no trouble and is extremely submissive. I will not ask for his recall just at this moment, but must repeat that I should with pleasure see him uprooted ("déniché") from here very soon.[1]

Why he had ever entered the Church is only to be explained on the ground that its revenues, as they existed before the Revolution, were considered peculiarly adapted to the pecuniary requirements of the younger sons of great families, who desired the further advantage of being untrammelled by any consequent responsibilities, sacred or secular. His

[1] Empress Maria Theresa to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, March 15, 1772.

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clerical obligations lay lightly on one who played a singularly unclerical part in regard to women, and whose male associates were not among the most reputable of their kind. He was a good example of the type of Prince-Bishop under the old *régime*—a tall figure, amiable and magnificent manners, the air and address of a typical *grand seigneur*, joined to an unbounded hospitality that gained him a certain popularity. Some of his biographers wax eloquent over his beauty and extreme youth, but he was verging on forty when he went to Vienna, and even to superficial judges of physiognomy his portraits do not convey a really pleasant impression. The rosy face incongruously suggests a cunning old baby. The mocking gleam in the blue eyes is far removed from the genuine fun and wit that make the eyes in some really aged faces so attractive. The large mouth is undecided, weak and sensuous, the nose indicates a fondness for high living, and the smile intended by the artist to look benign only succeeds in suggesting fatuity.

All who knew Louis de Rohan best, even partial friends and admirers like that popular Baroness d'Oberkirch, who seems to have disliked nobody excepting the Necker family, insist on his amazing credulity. Occult sciences held for him an irresistible attraction, and the flagrant charlatans who abounded at that period by demonstrating weird theories and making indefinite promises were able to gull him up to the hilt. In the highest classes irreligion and unbelief had given way to strange forms of mysticism. This was specially prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century among the members of old families, to whose constant intermarriage may be attributed a number of undesirable characteristics transmitted from generation to generation. Princesse de Guéménée,

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his first cousin, and in succession to her aunt "Governess of the Children of France," was yet another firm votary of the theories of second-sight—a pioneer, in fact, in those earlier forms of what is now called psychical research, which were viewed by the orthodox Roman Catholic Church with equal alarm and abhorrence. To that pillar of ecclesiasticism the Empress-Queen, a priest—a Coadjutor-Bishop, a prospective Cardinal and Grand-Almoner who dabbled in black magic and the arts of alchemy, who responded to the venal smiles of any fairly attractive woman who crossed his path, a son of a great house who squandered the revenues of his diocese in entertaining crowds more remarkable for versatility than morality—seemed "more like an emissary of the devil than the envoy of the Most Christian King."

Prince Louis de Rohan's talents were of the social order, and perhaps only had the effect of rendering him all the more dangerous in those devious paths of a diplomatic career for which he had had no previous training. Baron de Besenval pays a high tribute to the conversational powers of the friend whose moral conduct was about on a par with his own. Louis de Rohan was the *enfant gâté* of a society which would face pestilence and famine without flinching, meet ruin and disaster with a smiling face and a jesting tongue, but which would not, whatever might befall, submit to be bored for a single instant. He was at once the privileged jester and the consenting butt of a most exclusive set of persons, where no one entered with more zest into the babel of clever nonsense to a running accompaniment of peals of laughter in every key. It has always been so among a section of people who have more money than intellect, more leisure than grasp of the serious side of life, and the names of his modern prototypes

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occur readily enough to those who have known the society of any capital in Europe. He stimulated curiosity—a sure means of attracting attention—by his apparent unconsciousness of the absurdity of some of his speeches. One example may suffice. He kept open house, in the eighteenth-century meaning of the term, at his splendid château, Saverne, in Alsace, near Strasbourg. A number of invited and uninvited guests had already been made welcome and filled every spare room, when a very pretty young lady, accompanied by a good-looking officer, both giving different names, made their appearance too late to move on elsewhere before morning.

"Is the bath apartment full?" inquired the Bishop of a servant.

"No, Monseigneur, but——"

"Are there not several beds there?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, but——"

"Well," said the Bishop eyeing him sourly, "what is the matter? Narrow-minded people like you see harm in everything. There is nothing more to be said of any kind."

Such anecdotes were not likely to appeal to the Empress, who lumped up the new ambassador's most brilliant sallies under the generic term of *turlupinades*, and included him and his secretary, Georgel, and his enormous train of attendants, and even one Dombis, placed by the suspicious Aiguillon as a spy on the Bishop, in an indefinite category of "*mauvais garnements* . . . without merit or morals."

The history of that Embassy has been written and can find no place here. How its members worried and harassed Maria Theresa, how they added to her anxieties, shocked her susceptibilities and trampled on her prejudices, can be guessed by all who possess a rudimentary knowledge of the elements by which it was composed. Prince Louis's

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secretary and *âme damnée*, an ex-Jesuit, Georgel by name, is chiefly remembered now for his publication of some peculiarly venomous memoirs, and added the wretched talents of a forger to his other employments. He had assured himself of the complicity of an official who used to arrive after dark in a large cloak and a black mask from the offices of the Imperial Chancellor, and Prince Louis informed Louis XVI. at a subsequent period that he had managed to secure some of Comte de Mercy's private correspondence, of great value, derived from sources in Paris that ranged from the highest downwards, and began with a Minister of State denominated by Rohan a *vieil Argus*. But neither Georgel nor his master entertained any suspicion that for every move they made in Vienna, subtler brains and more skilful and cleaner hands than their own were paving the way in Paris for a checkmate. Comte de Mercy wrote to the Empress :—

> I have procured *by chance* a copy of a letter written by the Embassy secretary, the Abbé Georgel, to an intimate friend. I fancied it might not be displeasing to Your Majesty to be informed of the contents. . . . I have other means of information.

No doubt he had. His letters are full of the weapons he employed and the pains he took to get Prince Louis replaced by Baron de Breteuil or the Marquis de Noailles, whose father refused the Embassy to the Court of St. James for his second son, who was appointed to London in 1776, and in 1783 to Vienna as the last representative of the old monarchy in that capital. It was not long before the Empress had ceased to weigh the merits of these respective candidates, and told Mercy that she would be glad to see any "well-behaved, well-intentioned and reasonable man." Six months after Louis XVI. had succeeded to the throne

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the Bishop returned reluctantly to his native country, over head and ears in debt, having lost the little reputation he formerly possessed. He proposed to return to Vienna as a private individual to take leave of all the dear friends he had left without goodbyes by reason of his hurried departure. The Empress would regard, she said, the execution of the project "as a personal affront." Undoubtedly he behaved in a most extraordinary manner, and secure in the support of du Barry and his own powerful relations, condoned strange disorders among his household and the *personnel* of his Embassy. The former constantly inaugurated street rows, as, for example, when, at a display of fireworks in the Prater, the crowd was irritated into throwing stones, and was pacified by the police with great difficulty. Part of his enormous and absurd retinue consisted of some well-born and ill-brought-up pages who, attending the ambassador to Schönbrunn, fell on an unfortunate sentry on duty and wounded him severely. The servants who found themselves in want of ready money took advantage of Embassy privileges to smuggle in French kid gloves, which, it was said, soon became cheaper and more plentiful in Vienna than at the Palais Royal. This nefarious trade was cut short by the Empress's withdrawing privileges of Embassy from all alike, in order to avoid wounding the susceptibilities of the Ministry of Aiguillon, who himself spoke to Mercy of "difficulties regarding Customs," adding that Rohan was a "panier percé" (a windbag) not to be believed on his word of honour! Though his indiscretion passed all bounds, it was really less pernicious than the evil stories he spread about everybody he disliked, and the endless mischief he made. He had plenty of time to work wickedness, for he was left for two and a half years in his place, and only recalled after

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the accession of Louis XVI. As we have seen, he revived the calumnies concerning the supposed poisoning of the late Dauphin by the Duc de Choiseul, and spread stories in Vienna tending to the extreme discredit of the King's daughters. He enjoyed such a success with the fair ladies of Vienna that Maria Theresa said they were "ensorcelées" (bewitched), and after he left for France he despatched miniatures of himself painted on ivory and mounted with diamonds as rings, which his admirers, male and female, wore on the third finger, to the amazement of the Empress, who said she "would not have believed it had she not seen it with her own eyes." She was also informed that Prince Kaunitz possessed one of these souvenirs, although she had not seen him wearing one.

The visit of Baron Neny to Paris on purely private business between the Empress and her daughter filled Rohan with misgivings as to his own recall, and he made an official complaint to Prince Kaunitz, who, it is to be hoped, snubbed him as severely as he deserved. The Empress took this more calmly than she did his publication of a supposititious letter from herself to the Queen of Naples on the partition of Poland, in which Maria Theresa was credited with a number of statements that she had never made, besides "abusing the Emperor in no measured terms." Rohan had previously quoted letters to the Dauphine which it was later supposed, if they existed at all, were fabricated for the occasion by Georgel. Comte de Mercy was astounded that such liberties could be taken with crowned heads: "The audacious assertions of this ambassador on the pretended letters of Your Majesty deserve on all counts a severe punishment . . . Such folly, however, only excites contempt."

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Fortunately, Comte de Mercy had many more useful feelings at his command, and he shines nowhere more conspicuously as a diplomat of the first order than in the dexterity with which he eventually ensured the removal of the unsuitable envoy. He now proceeded to interview Madame de Marsan on the subject, when she told him in floods of tears that she and her brother were growing old, that they had fixed all their hopes on their nephew, while she herself had continued in her "Service" for twenty years in order to ensure him the post of Grand-Almoner, which he would never obtain if the Empress made a formal request for his removal, etc., etc. A few days later Mercy had coached Marie-Antoinette as to the best means of influencing her deadly enemy, which the Dauphine did so successfully that Comtesse de Marsan, "appearing extremely alarmed," announced her intention of accelerating her hopeful nephew's return. She begged the Dauphine for details, especially as to the Empress's causes for displeasure, points on which the young princess (ably advised) professed complete ignorance. It has been said that this was a false move of Comte de Mercy, and that the consequences of that interview descended years later on the devoted head of the Queen. It is impossible to be certain whether the Rohan family's dislike of her dated from this time, or whether Madame de Marsan was capable of growing more inimical than she had been from the first. "I doubt whether in any country in the world there exists a more dangerous woman," had been Mercy's opinion, and the Comte d'Artois warned his sister-in-law that the Governess "never lost an opportunity of placing a word against her with all possible spite and wickedness," at which, reported the ambassador, "the Archduchess appeared much affected" and showed a very youthful inclination,

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promptly nipped in the bud, to rush off then and there and ask her point-blank what she meant. It is, I think, evident that Madame de Marsan was more affected by her audience of the Dauphine than was supposed (or than Mercy made out), for the interview was quickly followed by a note from Prince de Soubise asking for an appointment at the Austrian Embassy, where he arrived next day, very *effarouché* and anxious, only calming down after a long explanation.

Within a year of his arrival in Austria Louis de Rohan had known to what impressions he gave rise, though, as the following fragment of an intercepted letter will show, he was not always accurate in his suspicions. The letter was written to some lady in Paris :—

> They hunted up every chicane, down to trying to prove me not responsible. . . . Then these devils attacked my character from the point of view of my priestly calling. *That* was successful, but I was wide awake, and I wrote to the King that I must expect this imputation, for they had endeavoured to arouse the Empress's scruples. . . . The Abbé Georgel who serves me well has nothing to fear. Oh the wretches! How I despise them! How mistaken they were to persecute me! Meanwhile they try to ruin me in the estimation of the Emperor, but I fancy I have little to fear. As to that, Prince de Kaunitz makes up to me for everything, he is not only my friend, he is far more if it is possible. I have every cause to congratulate myself, too, on Comte de Mercy. I beg you to do me the service of letting him know how grateful I am to him.

Only a few months before the death of Louis XV. the clamour at the conduct of the very unpriestly Bishop had reached such dimensions that he proposed to go to Paris to clear his character, and return to Vienna to vacate his post in due form before retiring with all the honours of a successful and well-performed mission. The Empress's perspicacity was seldom at fault. She wrote rather

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obscurely to the Dauphine, but the intention is clear :—

As to Rohan, you had better seem to know nothing unless Mercy begs you ; it is because of the influence this horrible Bishop might have on you that I still dissemble, but should the occasion present itself it would be delivering us from a great burden.

Subsequently she wrote to Mercy :—

I have only put up with him so long for the sake of my daughter. . . . As his relations in France are numerous and fairly powerful, there are those who fear he may revenge on my daughter the wrongs they pretend were done him by my proceedings. They fear this all the more that they suppose that she does not maintain reserve on the letters I write her that concern Rohan personally. You will judge the value of these suppositions better than I. I only repeat that Rohan is always more and more inconsequent and insolent.

Many historians profess to discern reprisals in the fatal story of the diamond necklace. I do not think this likely, for the *dénouement* of that dramatic episode constituted a crushing blow to the Cardinal's vanity. My own belief is that he was, as he had so often been before, the dupe of a very low-class *intriguante*. The extraordinary possibility of compromising a Queen's name to such an extent before the plot was discovered is only to be explained by the bad tone of her surroundings.

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CHAPTER XV

POLITICAL LESSONS

DETAILED considerations of the momentous occurrences that distinguished those eventful years can find no place in these over-full pages.

Maria Theresa's private letters to and about her sons and daughters must inevitably be regarded, by all who wish to take an impartial view of their relations, in the light of a kind of political barometer, indicative of conditions that could not affect the intercourse of ordinary parents and children. If she possessed the maternal instinct in an unusual degree, she never forgot for a single instant to remind her children of their responsibility to their native or their adopted country, as the case might be. Accordingly, a daughter's marked dislike for du Barry and inattention to that strange factor in the situation, represented the possible jeopardising of the Franco-Austrian alliance. Those indiscretions of a "petit Broglie," that aroused the keen indignation of intolerant youth, were condoned by a Sovereign who never forgot a service or permitted the lapse of fifteen years to obliterate the recollection of the present offender's behaviour at the time of the battle of Prague—"the most critical situation," added the Empress, "in which I ever found myself placed." And Marie-Antoinette's childlike satisfaction in her own transparent horror of Mademoiselle Bécu unluckily coincided with the moment

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of the preliminary operations tending towards the first partition of a country against which none of the Great Powers of Europe could allege legitimate complaint. On 17th February, 1772, the Empress Catherine and the King of Prussia signed a secret agreement, participated in, in the following April, by the Cabinet of Vienna—"That unhappy partition of Poland," wrote his mother to her son Ferdinand, "that has cost me ten years of my life."

She did not exaggerate. She had spared no pains to avert what she regarded as equally un-Christian and impolitic; but her advances to her latest ally were in no sense endorsed by the Emperor or her Government. The French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, controlled by the false and inexperienced Aiguillon, was no longer the important factor it had been under his able predecessor; nor, indeed, was their master better fitted to play a leading part on a wider stage than he had done in the country he had spent his life in endeavouring to ruin.

"At a distance of 1500 miles it would be difficult to rescue Poland," wrote Louis XV.[1] to Comte de Broglie; "I should have desired that it might remain intact, but can give no assistance beyond good wishes."

These were too faintly expressed to reach Vienna, or to penetrate the ears of one whose secret correspondence proves that her sympathy for what the satirical journals called "le morceau des rois," would have expanded into a more practical form had she had a free hand. What was long described by impartial historians as the "chief blot on the glorious reign of Maria Theresa" was, as we now know, a source of grief and pain to her

[1] To do Louis XV. justice, contemporary diplomatists describe him as much affected by "a very pathetic letter, recalling old promises," from the unfortunate King of Poland.

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long after her reluctant consent had been extorted by her advisers in general, and the Emperor and Kaunitz in particular. In April the former had written to his brother Leopold:—

It is no longer a mystery that one of our Army Corps will enter Poland in June, but as to the partition the utmost secrecy must be maintained, although it commences to leak out, and the French are beginning to get wind of the mine at Berlin.

From there it was as easy for the great Frederick to sneer to d'Alembert: "Doubtless the Empress Catherine and I are two brigands—but that pious Empress-Queen, how has she arranged all this with her confessor?" as it was for the French ambassador in Austria to sharpen his wit on what was quite beside his comprehension. His letter to Aiguillon was read aloud in the *risqué* privacy of one of Madame du Barry's suppers, accompanied by a suggestion that Louis de Rohan had addressed it direct to the favourite herself:—[1]

I have seen the Empress weeping over the misfortunes of oppressed Poland, but that Princess, versed in the art of not permitting herself to be divined, appears to me to have tears at her command. With one hand she holds a handkerchief before her eyes, while with the other she grasps the steel of the third spoiler.

This was one among many countless incidents which, unknown to the Empress, complicated the difficulties of her daughter's position, and the existence of which did not perhaps enter sufficiently into the judgments of the girl's conduct by a

[1] After the Restoration this anecdote (with many others) was regarded as apocryphal, resting, as it did, on the bare testimony of Soulavie and Madame Campan. No less an authority than Monsieur Geffroy discredited it altogether in 1875. But one of the Comte de Provence's curious unsigned fragments subsequently came to light vouching for the story, which he seems to have discussed with his sister-in-law herself, probably during those long *tête-à-tête* of which Comte de Mercy disapproved.

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fond, if rather over-severe, parent. We can imagine Marie-Antoinette's indignation at the recital of an episode that offended all her tenderest susceptibilities, accustomed as she was to the profound respect with which the Empress's own subjects expressed their love for her. To see her criticised in such terms by a man for whom his own relations were hard put to excuse his strange conduct, must have been a bitter pill to swallow by any one who knew the facts. Comte de Provence said long afterwards that his sister-in-law was quite aware what had happened, and he blamed Aiguillon's "imprudence" in having told Mercy, who was decidedly not in the least dependent for his information on the Minister, whom he thoroughly despised. The probabilities are that it was the Prince himself who enlightened Marie-Antoinette, as he did about a great deal besides of which it would have been far better for her to know nothing.

We may contrast such hostile opinions with the views added by the Empress in autograph on a confidential note of Baron v. Swieten,[1] dated 15th February, 1772:—

> I do not understand the political principles which in the case of two using their superior strength to oppress the innocent, oblige a third to imitate the same injustice on the pretext of expediency in the present and precaution for the future. This strikes me as untenable. A prince possesses no rights beyond those of a private individual. The aggrandisement and maintenance of his dominions will enter into no considerations when we all appear to render our account.[2]

And to her eldest son, to whose reasoning she had

[1] Austrian Ambassador to Prussia.

[2] The original of this memorandum still shows an endorsement in Prince Kaunitz's handwriting: "Opinion of Her Majesty the Empress-Queen on the course to pursue in consequence of the note of Baron v. Swieten."

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listened with manifest disapproval, the Empress expressed herself in no equivocal terms :—

I am too oppressed by our critical situation to refrain from exposing it further to the light of day, and endeavouring to find a remedy—if not a good one, at least the best of bad. . . . It is not possible to retrace our steps at present after the misplaced ones that I have ever regarded as such . . . since Nov., 1770, when the march of troops in Italy and the Low Countries was decided, and since the unlucky convention with the Turks was signed. Our menacing tone to Russia, and our mysterious proceedings with our allies and our enemies alike, all this has resulted in the establishment of a principle to endeavour to profit by hostilities between the Porte and Russia, to extend our frontier, and reap advantages which we had not thought of before the war. We desired to imitate the Prussians while at the same time retaining all appearances of honour. It is possible that I am mistaken : and that these circumstances are more favourable than I can consider them ; but, if they procured for us Wallachia, Belgrade itself, I should consider them too dearly bought at the expense of honour, of the national glory, of good faith and religion. Throughout my unhappy reign we have endeavoured in all things at least to exhibit true and equitable conduct, besides good faith, moderation, and fidelity to our engagements. This ensured to us the confidence, I had almost said the admiration of Europe. It is a year since all was lost. I confess it is painful to bear, and nothing in the world has cost me so much as the loss of our reputation. Unhappily, I must own to you that we deserve it; and the remedy I look to is that we reject as bad and ruinous all attempt to profit by these troubles, and that we deliberate on the best means of emerging as quickly as possible from this unhappy situation, with the least evil result, without thinking of fresh acquisitions, but only of the re-establishment of our credit and good faith and, as far as possible, the balance of power.[1]

This was the language of one who was not likely to be turned from any course of action approved by her conscience. The good of the peoples committed to her charge, the relief of want

[1] Empress Maria Theresa to Joseph II., January 25, 1772.

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and misery, and the maintenance of peace, these were the noble aims that determined the policy of Maria Theresa and permeated her strong clear mind. Fortunately for herself she was untroubled by those abstract considerations which arise at the wrong moment to puzzle the brains, and act adversely on the decisions, of complex personalities. She reached her point and acted on her convictions with an undeviating precision expressed in the forcible, rather polyglot diction of one who thought in German, wrote in French, and spoke Italian as fluently as either of the two first-named languages.

In the great game of politics, as at chess, a skilled player, recognising the inexpediency of moving the king, may find it necessary to play a pawn. It was perhaps inevitable that at this juncture the Empress saw no alternative—and it is certain she wasted no valuable time in seeking any—to embarking the childish Dauphine on a career that held for no one so few illusions as for Maria Theresa herself. "I love my daughter," she wrote of the Queen of Naples, "as I do the Dauphine too well to wish to see them enter upon such a thorny path." In spite of this commendable sentiment she used the lever of a great affection for herself to propel the younger into the "difficult and delicate profession" which her own long experience condemned. After all, the favourite brother, who really loved the little sister and had made a careful study of a brilliant, unequal character in many respects not unlike his own, acted in a precisely similar manner later on. When the rides on donkeys and horses, the romps with children and dogs, had been exchanged for more dangerous pastimes and playfellows—for plumes and pompoms, for Trianon and St. Cloud, for the Duchesse de Polignac and the Baron

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de Besenval—those who should have been the first to deprecate on the Queen's behalf any active participation in State affairs made use of her remorselessly to further their own ends. A phlegmatic, slow-witted English or German girl might have emerged scatheless from an ordeal that held exceptional dangers for a sensitive, highly-strung nature, compounded of that indefinable mixture of personal attractions which is more enduring than beauty, as commanding as intellect, as potent as fascination, and which partakes of the nature, and conveys subtle suggestions, of them all.

Not long before the disastrous reign of Louis XV. dragged to its end, one of Choiseul's relentless foes, who was not to be disarmed by the consignment of his enemy to political oblivion, launched a poisoned arrow at the living evidence of that statesman's Austrian bias :—

> All Queens should resemble the wives of Louis XIV. and Louis XV., who knew no other passions than that of doing good. I see one here who is preparing to afford us the spectacle of great explosions in a nation celebrated for its mobility. She hears of nothing but her future greatness . . . the perspective of pleasure with the Earth at her feet. . . . These illusions were presented to her even in the midst of the Court in which she was born by emissaries of the one that awaited her. . . . A Queen who is crowned for no other purpose than to amuse herself is a fatal acquisition to a people charged to defray the cost.[1]

There is truth in these bitter words. One is, however, tempted to wonder why we are presumably intended to infer that no responsibility whatever was incurred by the many who, old in years or experience, or both, trampled under foot every decency of life, every rudimentary principle of religion and rectitude, in closest proximity to, and

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Dauphine,* by Monsieur de Nolhac, pp. 248-9.

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under the very eyes of, a child whose education had been undertaken without the most elementary conception of how to carry it on. However faulty their morality might be, it would be absurd to question the ability of many of those who were in a position to see Marie-Antoinette daily and to gauge the power of the charms they could not deny, well as it might suit them to feign to ignore the dangers that no one knew better than all the men and many of the women who surrounded the King. Neither the neglected Infanta Marie-Thérèse nor the insulted Marie Leszczynska could have succeeded in maintaining in essentials a higher standard of conduct than was done by their thoughtless childish successor during those seven critical years. But no extenuating circumstances, even had they been guessed at by him, would have been likely to modify the stinging comments that the Abbé Desnoyer, ex-Jesuit as he was,[1] took a dismal pleasure in placing on record, little guessing, perhaps, how true a prophet he was destined to prove. Possibly he had approached Choiseul and crossed swords with that past-master of sarcasm and repartee, emerging by no means victorious from the encounter: it is unlikely, however, that he had any personal acquaintance with the Dauphine, although he may have guessed the ill-guarded, much-discussed secret of her relations with Louis-Auguste. An "emissary of the Court that awaited her" could be none other than Vermond, who en-

[1] Rightly or wrongly, the French Jesuits attributed to Choiseul the chief responsibility for their fall. It may be briefly recalled that this celebrated Society had suffered great reverses. Pombal thrust all the members he could lay hands on out of Portugal in 1758. Six years later they were driven from Spain, as they had already been from Russia in 1719. On their refusal to obey the third of three Government decrees in France in 1764, the Order was suppressed and its members compelled to evacuate the country. In 1773 a Papal Bull dispersed the Society altogether.

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larged to the Austrian ambassador on the enmity he himself inspired and the loneliness to which he found himself reduced. But neither required to be reminded how critical the times were.

Comte de Mercy was, if anything, over-anxious; the King's health was visibly failing, and his mind was weakened. Mercy never ceased to deliver himself of homilies couched in what he considered to be the most persuasive terms; but

> the representations of Y.M. can alone effect what is to be desired . . . for the Archduchess may be in a position to play a great part ("de jouer un grand rôle"), and this before long: H.R.H. should be prepared beforehand. It is more than time to occupy ourselves with this: but I encounter difficulties when it is a question of turning the mind of the Archduchess to serious subjects in the near future.

The Empress replied by a letter entirely in her own hand, a copy of which she directed should be returned to her at once, and the original used as the ambassador thought best. Armed with these credentials, Comte de Mercy lost no time in presenting himself at the palace, when a hint of his errand was enough to send Marie-Antoinette into a fever of impatience, to cause her to hurry the Dauphin through his supper, to hustle him out of the way, and to summon the ambassador to her boudoir—all within the space of a quarter of an hour. In silence he handed her the letter, which she read with unmistakable signs of agitation:—

> There is our sad position . . . we know for certain that England and the King of Prussia want to get hold of la Barry; you must know this better than I. . . . You see by this how important it is for the preservation of the Alliance that every means should be tried. I shall never abandon the existing system. I have given convincing proofs of this: but if France dallies with Prussia ("si la France pateline avec la Prusse"), which assuredly will take her in, I ought to tell you that that is the sole cause that would oblige me, to my great regret, to change in the same manner. To prevent these

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ills for the Monarchy and family, all means should be tried, and there is only my daughter, aided by your counsels and knowledge of the locality, who can render this service to her family and country. Before everything she must by assiduities and affection cultivate the good graces of the King: try to divine his thoughts and anticipate his wishes. I do not exact servility—still less intimacy; only the attentions due to her grandfather. . . . Possibly the Alliance depends on it. . . . I rely on your efforts and those of my dear daughter, you to exercise all your care, and she all her charms. There is nothing to be compared with what she may do . . . and believe me your very affectionate . . .

Observing her narrowly, Comte de Mercy saw that the girl remained "fort rêveuse"—what were her dreams about, poor child? After a short silence she inquired:

"What can I do to influence the King? He is taken away from us, and not allowed to see us: and in the attentions to be paid where does Madame du Barry come in?"

Then the ambassador plunged into a discourse which (with a good many interruptions) lasted for about three-quarters of an hour. "Unhappily," said he, "one could not disguise the vexatious fact that 'that du Barry' was in a position to exercise a preponderating influence in the most important affairs," of which he quoted numerous examples and instances. He pointed out how flattering it was for the Dauphine to be the selected to co-operate in the maintenance of a good understanding between the two Courts, and he enlarged on the complications of her position in the event of a breach. This led him by easy stages to the crux of the matter—"the difficult position of a Dauphine who was not the mother of an heir to the throne."

What answer could she make? Comte de Mercy does not say: but he was in many respects more lenient than the Empress, perhaps because he actually saw all that went on; and we know

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that his charge possessed his sympathies and that he felt deeply for her in the delicate circumstances in which she had been placed through no choice or fault of her own.

On more than one occasion he made no secret to the Empress how Madame de Noailles had reported to himself and Vermond, who endorsed her account, that the Archduchess was subject to moments of great sadness, attributed by all who commented on the existence of her low spirits to the uncertainty of the duration and the consequences of the cold manner and strange indifference of Louis-Auguste.

The only particular in which I have ever suspected the faithful ambassador of colouring his reports with a roseate tinge not quite warranted by the circumstances, refers directly or indirectly to the Dauphin, his altered appearance and his rapid improvement. Had he actually progressed at the rate and to the extent described by the Imperial envoy, he must have reached a higher degree of excellence two or three years after his marriage than even fairly tolerant contemporary opinion would indicate. A task that included making the best of the Dauphin never led the ambassador into the fatal error of attempting to alter or extenuate what was due to the actions or the deficiencies of others. Naturally he made the most of her son-in-law to Maria Theresa, just as he would probably have done had his scene of action been Parma, where an even more hopeless scion of the Bourbons was leading, and being led by an Austrian Archduchess, into what threatened to turn to serious mischief. Owning to Kaunitz that he spared no pains to "answer subject by subject all that I imagine best calculated to reassure her Majesty and spare her the useless torments she gives herself," Mercy was unable to commit him-

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self to a less disquieting opinion than that "there is no longer anything shocking in the Dauphin's appearance." This admission lets in considerable light on the impression he must have produced two years before, when that ornament of the Royal wedding festivities, Madame du Barry, described the bridegroom as "le gros garçon mal élevé." Mercy went on:—

When Her Royal Highness deigns to enter into explanations with me, I am exceedingly careful to point out all the most agreeable aspects of her position. She told me lately that I look at everything from the bright side and that I am unaware of the circumstances that affect and pain her.

He probably guessed that the sting lay in the fact that there was no one to whom she could confide her troubles, or on whom she could depend for advice. He expressed a hope that the Empress would say "something consoling" calculated to calm these doubts and fears, until such time as "it should please Heaven to ameliorate circumstances which one knew not how to explain, even to oneself." Over a year before, like our old friend Maître Renard, Comte de Mercy "tint à peu près ce langage," and handled the most delicate questions with a dexterity and refinement peculiarly his own, expressed in the well-rounded periods that excite one's deepest admiration—considering the subject. The Empress, on the contrary, demanded detailed explanations and returned continually to the charge with her usual energy. To *faire des phrases* formed no part of her system, when a political consideration was involved:—

I learn with pleasure that the Dauphin appears to alter to his advantage, but I understand nothing in his conduct as regards his wife: is this perhaps due to the bad principles inspired by his education?

And soon after:—

. . . Besides which, my daughter's position being a very

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delicate one, exposed as she is to many circumstances in which she might require your advice and that of the Abbé de Vermond, it is infinitely important, etc., etc.

Comte de Mercy had no misgivings on one point:—

The Dauphine is so happily constituted, endowed with so excellent a character and well-balanced a judgment, that there is most certainly no fear of serious divergences of conduct—only of little errors due to youth and vivacity. . . . I observe that anything coming from your Majesty produces the greatest impression and continually occupies her mind.

The admonitions resulting from this have not been preserved, but it would seem that the Empress feared Mercy's minimising a possible danger, for he replied:—

. . . My duty obliges me to reproduce in my very humble reports, with the most precise fidelity, the good and the bad of all circumstances. Never could I conceive it to be my duty to tranquillise Your Majesty at the expense of the truth and of facts; but I venture to persist in asserting that although the position of the Archduchess is very delicate, her conduct in essentials will preserve her from all regrettable complications.

There is abundant evidence that Maria Theresa accepted this view of the two men who knew her daughter best. The blame poured forth without stint or restraint: the harsh terms employed in criticising the follies of the child whom Comte de Mercy held to be the favourite of all—never once did this stream of strongly-worded criticism hint at the bare existence of a more serious cause for complaint. "Do not allow yourself to get discouraged," she wrote, when the full measure of Louis-Auguste's uncouth appearance and manners had dawned on her; "preserve your charming gaiety more than ever and trust in Providence; all will be well." At the same time, however, she informed Mercy that one who had known the

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Dauphine since she was a baby had expressed the opinion that "if a young girl with such a face could not inspire love in the Dauphin, there was very little to hope—except that time might possibly effect a change in such strange conduct"; to which the ambassador responded, with the additional stateliness which indicated his being slightly ruffled, to the effect that he had "nothing to reply to what Your Majesty deigns to call my attention, in regard to the sentiments of the Baron van Swieten," who, let us hope, felt rather crushed in return for his officiousness. Possibly the Empress herself saw that he had not contributed materially to the solution of the problem, for she replied (Sept., 1773): ". . . The situation is incomprehensible, and I am amazed that things are allowed to remain as they are without any one being occupied with them."

After two years of married life, Louis-Auguste observed, by no means for the first time, that his education had been "a scandal," and began to study the memoirs of Sully, and had the Gazettes read aloud to him. All these signs of progress Mercy attributed to "the insinuations" of Marie-Antoinette, who, secretly coached by her adviser, "took great credit to herself" for persuading the Dauphin to devote to intellectual pursuits a few moments of a day filled by manual labour and the inexhaustible pleasures of shooting and hunting. He also occupied himself in regulating his allowance, reduced to a very serious state by the late Duc de la Vauguyon, whose ostentatious piety had not prevented his selling places about his pupil's person to the highest, if the least suitable bidder, and who had permitted depredations as bad as those which Mercy had successfully dealt with in the Dauphine's household. Having, as she candidly remarked, "no

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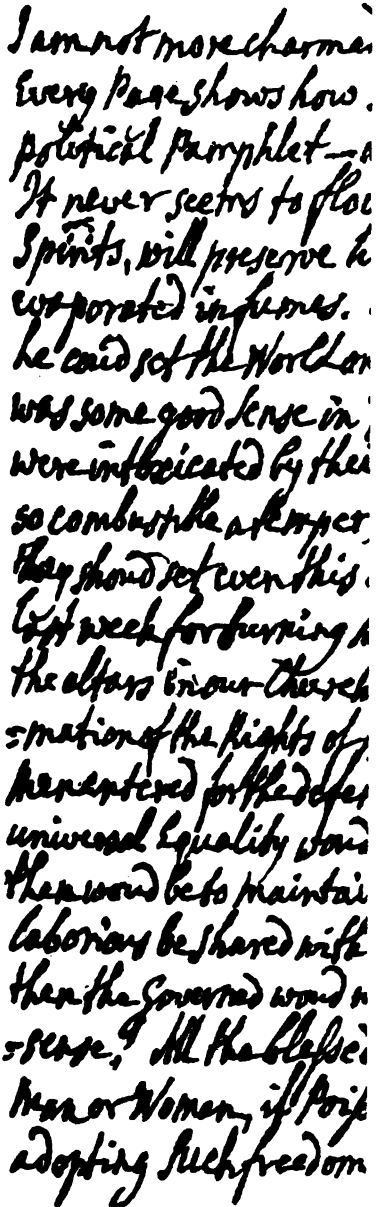
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d with his Wit & Eloquence than with his Enthusiasm;
sincerely he is in earnest — a wonderous merit in a
Mother party-Writers act zeal for the Public, but
from the Heart. That Cordiality, like a phial of
is book, when some of his Doctrines would have
Lord Stanhope's were the ravings of a Lunatic, imagining
fire with Phosphones. Let down I hear, said there
that rant. How fortunate that Price & his Coherents
crown hopes, & flatter'd themselves that Europe was in
; that by throwing their farthing Squibs from a pulpit.
Country in a blaze, & like the Wretches hanged like
Cages, should plunder some silver candlesticks from
es, to which the rights of Men invite them. That Procla
tion is ipso facto a Dissolution of all Society, into which
ve of the rights of every Individual. The Consequence of
be, that the Industrious only labour, the Idle not. Who
n the Practice! Must the Produce of the Labours of the
the Indolent? Oh! but there should be some Government
to be equal with the Governors — but it is to compleat hon-
Liberty the French seem to have gained, is that every
Ladies are Women, may hang whom they please. Dr Price
opened the Nation's Eyes — Hominis est quimaly perse!

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resources as regarded society," she induced Louis-Auguste to share her dancing-lessons, without, however, inspiring him with any of the remarkable aptitude she herself displayed.

When Mercy lets himself go on the subject of her fascinations, and the effect of her charming manners and unexampled grace at the little balls given in her honour by Madame de Noailles, Madame de Marsan, and others, we must acquit him of undue partiality, for his eulogies were echoed by many less interested observers. Horace Walpole's tribute to her manner of dancing is too well known to find a place here; others thought the same of her every movement. "I shall never forget the Queen stepping out of the carriage," wrote Mr. Wollaston from St. Cloud, years later, to Mrs. Frampton, at Moreton in Dorsetshire, "and then waiting and taking the Dauphin by the hand, and leading him upstairs, afterwards appearing on the balcony between her two children. I assure you Mrs. Siddons was never finer in any of her parts." Another foreigner endorsed these opinions, on information given to her by one to whom favouritism, where the Royal Family was concerned, could not be attributed. Madame de Boufflers (whose letters have already been quoted) had emphasised an equivocal position by sharing the exile of Prince de Conti, but she came to Paris on the occasion of a visit to the French capital by her friend, Lady Mary Coke, who wrote to Lady Strafford:—

> Though she (Madame de Boufflers) was no courtier, she could not help admiring the Dauphine and thought her a miracle for her age. She has got the King's leave to have a ball every Monday, and before the Princes of the Blood were forbidden the Court, Madame de Boufflers and her daughter-in-law were often at Versailles at these balls, where they saw a great

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deal of her, and she says nothing can be more amiable, lively, polite, good-humoured, and a conduct so prudent, that in all the difficulties of her life she never commits a fault. The Dauphin admires her, and says she has more grace than any one he ever saw in all his life. . . .[1]

The young couple must have formed an odd contrast. To please his wife Louis-Auguste spared no effort to learn to dance; but all her attempts to overcome his dislike of music resulted in failure. She made rapid progress in her lessons with both the harp[2] and harpsichord, as well as in singing, for which she had a marked taste. "I am faithful to my dear harp," she wrote to the Empress, and added with pardonable pride that some music sent her by her mother had proved easy to read at sight. Maria Theresa herself possessed a fine voice, but gave up practising early, presumably from want of time. Louis-Auguste shared no such disability, unfortunately for himself, while the fine arts appealed to him not at all. It is singular that some of the most beautiful examples of furniture in the world are called after him.

The Dauphine complained to Comte de Mercy, with a vehemence that thoroughly alarmed the latter, of the Prince's "extraordinary taste for everything that relates to building, masonry, carpentry, etc." He was perpetually making alterations in his apartments, which was less objectionable than his returning in a state of exhaustion after labouring

[1] *Journal of Lady Mary Coke*, vol. iii., p. 400—Letter to Lady Strafford from Paris, April, 1771.

[2] At the Victoria and Albert Museum is a Kingwood and ormolu-mounted stand with china plaques said to have been given by Marie-Antoinette to Mrs. Eden, presumably when the latter was residing at Sèvres, long before her husband was created Lord Auckland. It is labelled "*Reading or* music stand," but is obviously intended for harp music, and is included among the priceless collection of French furniture which was bequeathed to the nation by the late Mr. Jones of Piccadilly, and which demands far more space than it occupies at present to do it any sort of justice.

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for hours at a time with workmen (presumably engaged in repairs at Versailles), whom he assisted in the roughest work, such as moving paving-blocks, tiles, planks, and similar materials employed by builders. "Latterly I perceived that the Archduchess was excessively impatient at and hurt by this behaviour," and gentleness and patience were enjoined on her by the wise mentor to whom she confided her woes. She found the Comte de Provence, who spent hours in her apartments, far more amusing; he was a great gossip, and passed on a large number of the very unedifying anecdotes for which Versailles was notorious. Comte de Mercy never hesitated to report unfavourably on the state of that prince's health, which produced a very unpleasant skin-complaint affecting his hands and causing the loss of nearly all his hair, which at sixteen was nothing less than a misfortune. Perhaps all this was designed to reassure Maria Theresa, who imagined that he was better-looking than his elder brother, and objected to any more marked intimacy between the young people on account of the acknowledged insincerity of the Comte de Provence.

Of all his diplomatic successes with members of the French Royal Family, Mercy seems to have taken most pride in the influence he acquired over the heir to the throne: "The cold and reserved character of the young prince caused me to encounter difficulties which I began to fear were insurmountable." This was written late in 1772, when he became a little more hopeful, for on the occasion of a ball given by Madame de Durfort in honour of the young Royalties, the Dauphin stipulated that no one but the members of the hostess's family should be invited, but excepted the Imperial Ambassador, who has left it on record that

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the evening passed with much gaiety, and proverbs were played. The Dauphin, who is accused of paying attentions to nobody, ordered me to sit near him; he talked a great deal, and I was surprised at the facility of his conversation—he who speaks to no one, especially when he is outside his own apartments.

Comte de Mercy attributed a large part of Louis-Auguste's growing partiality for himself not only to the influences of "the Archduchess," but also to his conviction of the ambassador's discretion. Mercy realised that the Dauphin was aware of a great deal more than he was supposed even to notice of the incessant chatter that went on about his private affairs:—

He knows that I never depart from a tone calculated to divert curiosity and attention from this subject, and it is to this that I attribute a large part of the singular goodness he shows me. While he scarcely speaks to any one, he always has something to say to me; he comes to meet me whenever he perceives me, and at the ball on seeing me arrive he left his place and crossed the room in order to converse with me. Unfortunately his conversations are so disconnected ("si décousues par la forme et le fond") that I find it very hard to enunciate a few useful sentences. This, however, succeeds sometimes; and I see that the taste for serious subjects is not lacking; there is only a marked failure of habit and self-assurance.

Louis-Auguste's clumsiness and want of grace, being possibly capable of amelioration with time, was a less unprofitable theme than the inevitable loneliness of the Dauphine, which weighed heavily on her mind, militated against her improvement, and brought its own sad conviction of the distance of all those members of the girl's family to whom she was most fondly attached. Perhaps she missed most the two brothers nearest in age to herself, and Comte de Mercy never minimised the importance she attached to her letters from Vienna. The embargo on writing to

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Countess Brandis must have been removed; for Marie-Antoinette appealed to her mother to reprimand the late governess when a month's break occurred in the weekly correspondence, adding that, as all letters through the ordinary post were delivered exclusively through "my lady of honour"—namely, Madame de Noailles—it was not pleasant for her (the Dauphine) to have it supposed that she was neglected or forgotten in her own home. "She is very moved at the idea that the Archduke Maximilian owes her some replies," said Mercy, but the Empress thought little of this, pronouncing her youngest son "fort laconique" on paper, and she deputed others to describe a visit she had made to Esterhazy, when the entire family, attended by an immense retinue, visited the Prince of that name.

I am sorry the delay of the messenger caused you any anxiety. Bad news travels fast, and you may be certain that if anything happened to the family, or to me, an express would be despatched; thus, in future do not allow any delays to disturb your charming and tender heart, for some accident may happen to the messengers, who, as they go by Brussels, are subject to delays there. Seeing the affectionate interest you take in us, you shall receive a weekly letter from your brothers or sisters, who will take great pleasure in carrying out your wishes.[1]

The favourite playfellow had left Vienna and was now at Modena taking over the prospective governorship of Lombardy—with the cares of matrimony—on the shoulders of eighteen. The handsomest of the brothers, the Archduke Ferdinand, was pronounced "extremely pretty" by Lady Mary Coke, who expatiated on his figure and manner of dancing, and general appearance at Court functions with his two beautiful sisters, Marie-Christine and Elisabeth, mentioning other engaging attributes,

[1] Empress Maria Theresa to Marie-Antoinette, May 4, 1773.

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recalling those of the youngest sister far away in France. Lady Mary was told by an eye-witness of the Archduke's first meeting with his very plain bride, Beatrix d'Este, and of how, apparently not dismayed by the "interminable nose" she had described in her letters, the boy-bridegroom made such speeches about a fate which he stoutly declared he would have chosen for himself, that the Duke and Duchess of Modena "heard him with tears in their eyes." Perhaps his own description also moved his favourite sister, who declared to the Empress that "undoubtedly Ferdinand would prove a *bon mari*"—which, indeed, proved to be the case. Marie-Antoinette read out some of her brother's letter to the Dauphin, who, she thought, "seemed embarrassed" and made no remark, and who had certainly neither looked pretty nor made gracious speeches to any one on *his* wedding day—least of all to the childish bride. It is doubtful whether sufficient allowance has ever been made in France, even by those who lived near her on terms of comparative intimacy, for Marie-Antoinette's position and difficulties with regard to her husband. It was inevitable that, married so young to a perfect stranger, she should view him with the critical eye of early youth and should compare him with her own brothers. Her conversations with Comte de Mercy proved that she was fully alive to the Dauphin's defects of appearance, manner, speech, and the absence of nearly every attribute that the heir apparent to so splendid a throne should have possessed. What were the girl's sensations when she made her frequent public appearances with the Dauphin shuffling along beside her, screwing up his short-sighted eyes, poking his chin forward, and mumbling disjointed remarks when fairly nudged and prompted into tardy speech? A greater

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contrast to her brothers it would have been hard to find. Vermond could have enlightened her suite had the members of it attended to his hyperboles, which were generally received with scant favour, especially by that portion of the "Service" with which Monsieur Campan was chiefly concerned, and resented as a liberty on the part of an obscure person quite unknown to society. He was, in fact, much addicted to launching forth on the subject of the Imperial palaces, the affection inspired among all classes alike by the Empress, and the beauty and excellence of her family. Possibly of the three points the last was the one that met with most opposition. The bare possibility that any Court in Europe could be mentioned in the same breath with Versailles would have been regarded as the figment of a disordered brain, and few serious people in France had any objection to conceding the merits of Maria Theresa. But it is only necessary to read the accounts of the sensation created by the Emperor, when his long-postponed visit actually took place (in 1777), to realise how incorrect the previous ideas of Joseph II. had been. Accustomed to the selfish prodigality of their own monarchs, and to the fabulous pretensions of the Princes of the Blood, the gay Parisians were dumbfoundered at the appearance of a Sovereign who only asked to be left in peace to go about as much like a private individual as possible, who chose to sleep on a straw mattress laid flat upon the floor, and who preferred "a couple of rooms in an auberge" to all the splendours of Versailles. A "grand succès à Paris" was predicted for the Emperor by a French visitor to Vienna, carried away by the enthusiasm of a reception which no Bourbon would have accorded. "Le fat!" exclaimed Sir Robert Keith indignantly, who,

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devoted to the Emperor, considered the speech a great liberty, as the effect of his geniality was a foregone conclusion.

Joseph II. looked younger than his actual age, in spite of the partial loss of his very fair hair, which he wore plain and unpowdered, and which had receded from his forehead but grew thickly on the back of his head. His slight erect figure in the uniform which he so seldom exchanged for a court dress, his keen, clear-cut features and bright light-blue eyes, were sufficiently imposing until he spoke or smiled, showing a set of remarkably fine teeth. Then those who were presented to him — none more than the English — immediately became aware of the charm of his expression and the trouble he took to set them at their ease—a contrast indeed to Louis XV., who, when in a bad humour, spared no pains to make everybody feel small. Joseph II. was in the habit of mixing without parade or ostentation among those with whom he habitually consorted, entering without ceremony the houses of those members of the great families whom he preferred, when apparently his chief aim was to be regarded as the agreeable member of society that he undoubtedly was. Cultivated, well read, and a brilliant *raconteur*, possessed moreover of admirable manners, he would have shone in any company had he been simply the private individual he delighted to represent when travelling incognito as "Count Falckenstein." "We found him standing, alone, dressed as he always is, in uniform," said Mr. Arbuthnot; "the only ceremony at entrance is making a low bow. . . . He has something so good-natured and frank in his appearance and behaviour that one feels perfectly easy in his company. . . . He seemed to be in high spirits, but did not eat a bit of an exceeding good dinner which was set

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before him. As soon as he sat d
Robert Keith to stand by his chai
and laughing with him all the tin
Lady Mary Coke commented

great harmony that reigns in the Im
are always together, dine together, s
part of the evenings together.

The Emperor lives in great friendship
his two favourite sisters were the A
contracted to the King of Naples, but
before she set out, and the Dauphine.

Unfortunately Marie-Antoinette
example in one respect—little n
to do so. Her social talents were
according to one who was unde
qualified to judge :—

Her conversation becomes more and
is accurate and always ready with her re
of expressing herself that never suggest
She has, among others, the talent of talki
and that in such a manner as to convey
it that he or she is being individually a
of this facility, which makes the Archdu
nevertheless true that she does not t
tinguished people—never to strangers.[1]

This was very unlike the Empress
The day after one of the mo
many rather harsh diatribes w
her daughter, Maria Theresa rece
Coke in private :—

I went into a room (at Schönbrunn) t
garden . . .; in about a quarter of a
ladies said I was to go to the Empress's
room next to that hung with black she
duchesses and Archduke Maximilian wit
her look so well; she made me forget t
someness of the journey. . . . She told m
in me to keep my word (about coming

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to Empres

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"I hope you stay with us all the winter." She then said: "You see my family again diminished"; and looking at the Archduke Maximilian: "He is all I have left; it is terrible for him to be alone, he was bred up with his brother, they were always together."

After:

"You saw the Dauphine? What do you think of her? Very lively? at least by her letters she seems to continue so. She wears a great deal of rouge, does she not?"

Describing Maria Theresa, Lady Mary added:—

Lord Strafford saw her in her great beauty, but that, the smallpox and a great degree of fat have deprived her of. I don't mention her age, for everybody here affirms that until she had the smallpox she was extremely handsome . . . she is about my height,[1] and although very fat not at all encumbered with it . . . holds herself extremely well, and her air the most noble I ever saw; 'tis still visible her features have been extremely fine and regular, though the swelling from the smallpox never quite gone down, and a little degree of redness remaining; more spirit and sense in her eyes than I think I ever saw, and the most pleasing tone of voice in speaking.[2]

Previously to this, Madame de Rochechouart had told Lady Mary in Paris that there was "nothing easier than going to the Dauphine in private," adding that she herself "admired her above all things"—an opinion endorsed by Madame de Mirepoix,[3] who was sure the Dauphine "would be very glad to see Lady Mary," and in due course the Imperial ambassador intimated that the English visitor would be received at half-past four on the following Sunday. Lady Mary describes her reception:—

At four o'clock I waited upon Madame de Noailles at Versailles, who received me with great politeness, talked

[1] Lady Mary was tall.

[2] This was addressed to the writer's sister, Lady Strafford.

[3] Madame de Mirepoix was the "petite Maréssale" of Madame du Barry.

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MARIA THERESA, EMPRESS-QUEEN.
Collection of H.E. the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador.

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to me about the Empress, and said she was not surprised I admired her so much, for everybody did. In half an hour we went to the Dauphine's apartment, but she was gone to the Dauphin's; we stayed about ten minutes in her outward room. I was then told to go in. She was dressed in her hair with diamonds, without a hoop, and a black cloak. She is like enough to the family for me to have known her to be an Archduchess: the same beautiful shape and make, and, I think, a pretty face. I can't imagine what all those ladies could mean by saying she was like the Duchess of Grafton;[1] I never saw two people more different. She asked me how long I had been in France, and whether I intended to make a long stay, and what time I had been in Vienna; but said nothing of the Empress and the Archduchesses, which surprised me, as Madame de Noailles said to her that I was charmed with the Empress, and much flattered with her goodness to me. I think she said no more than I have told you, then made a curtsey, and I retired. She has a quick way of speaking, like the Archduchess Elisabeth.

This was probably the sister whom the Dauphine most strongly resembled, and whose miniature in a private room of Prince Charles of Lorraine at Brussels instantly recalled to Captain Collier her whom he never mentioned but as the "beautiful Dauphiness."

The difficulties of Mercy's position are apt to escape attention. It is rare indeed to find him writing in an optimistic strain:—

In my very humble report I was unable to allude to the motive determining the Dauphine's late good conduct, which

[1] The question which of the two Duchesses of Grafton was meant by these and other allusions has been discussed. I am inclined to think that, by a coincidence, both were referred to. The point was originally raised by Mr. Walpole, who in writing to the first commented on the Dauphine's likeness to her figure and walk—not to her features or colouring. She was not pretty, and was as dark as the Dauphine was fair. Lady Mary was not likely to mention this lady in 1774 by the name of her first husband. She had been Lady Ossory since 1769, and is often written of under that name. The second Duchess, Miss Elizabeth Wrottesley, a first cousin of Lord Ossory, was rather fair but not remarkable in any way.

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is none other than the effect of Your Majesty's secret letter, of which I enclose the copy as commanded. This letter so impressed the Dauphine that she has spoken to me almost daily of its contents. I am positive the impression will last for a long time, and I shall not fail to derive all the advantage I can. In brief, although dangers and inconveniences are always present in this Court, I am now much more at ease because owing to the knowledge of the locality which I now possess, the steps I have taken to be informed of everything at the time—by means, as I say, of the attention I bring to bear and the confidence of the Dauphine in my views, it is impossible that any unforeseen event should occur to which I cannot apply some instant remedy. I beg Your Majesty to feel quite at ease on whatever concerns H.R.H.

But by the same messenger he wrote to Baron Neny :—

The feuds, the quarrels, and the furies have pursued us to Compiègne. It is pitiful to see the black and wicked tone that has for some time gained ground here: no rank or profession is exempt: the wish to damage and to destroy, and to further a cabal, results in every sort of method being brought to bear; and all this extends further than it would be possible to describe.

Is it surprising that in such surroundings Marie-Antoinette frittered away her time, and wasted so much of the valuable years that should have been devoted to the improvement of her mind? She should have been established far away from Court, in some healthier, happier surroundings, carrying on her neglected education, instead of studying what Mercy called "la bonne politique" at Versailles, even under such a past-master as the ambassador. She requested him to re-read her the Empress's letter, and it became a peg, or as he put it a "point d'appui," on which many wise saws were hung.

I have seen Mercy, and after reading your dear letter I talked to him about the contents. . . . I will do my best. . . . where should I be in the case of a rupture between my two families? I trust *le bon Dieu* may preserve me from such

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a calamity, and inspire me as to what I ought to do; I prayed for this, and I will not forget what Mercy told me. . . .

She greeted that counsellor joyfully a fortnight later, exclaiming: "The Empress is pleased with me; she shows me the greatest affection; she warns me not to listen to the spirit of parties . . . she sees, also, how hard all this was at first for her dear child. . . ."

Alas! the dear child was too young and perhaps also too honest to play her part precisely as she was expected to do. The ambassador detected disquieting symptoms when he warned her of du Barry's impending appearance. The Dauphine, who had just come from mass, thus addressed him: "I prayed a great deal; I said, 'If I am to speak show me how to speak; I only desire to act as I may be inspired by Heaven'"—to which Comte de Mercy, who was a good man and had not the faintest intention of making irreverent comparisons, gently intimated that, on this occasion at least, the "voice of her august mother" unquestionably constituted the most suitable guide.

When the intruder appeared, the Archduchess addressed all her remarks to the Duchesse d'Aiguillon; only at the close of the interview, turning in the direction of Madame du Barry, she remarked: "It is bad weather: we shall not be able to go out to-day." This striking observation, being apparently addressed to the ceiling, was received in respectful silence, and the visitors withdrew, not knowing whether to be flattered or annoyed. Comte de Mercy immediately put down the Dauphine's air of coldness and reserve to the accidental presence of Louis-Auguste—with such effect that the favourite allowed herself to be convinced that, "dans le fond" (a rather unfathomable abyss), she had been well received.

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We may search in vain among the reports of the various diplomats to their different Courts for indications of any suspicion that it was the little Dauphine herself who constituted the subject-matter of so much of those long conversations between Mercy and the First Minister. These discussions were nearly always carried on in a crowd, while a number of pairs of Argus-eyes watched the two men as narrowly as possible in the hope of guessing at least the tenor of their discourse from the expression of either face. The fitting-out of ships of war at Brest, friction with the British Commissioner at Dunkirk, the possibilities of Spain declaring war, the revolution in Sweden, and the partition of Poland, were supposed in turn to form the basis of many pourparlers. Intercepted letters indicated possibilities which must be concealed at all costs. There seems to have been little difficulty at Vienna in obtaining copies of Lord Stormont's despatches addressed to the Foreign Office in London.

"I add for your information," wrote the Empress in 1772 to her ambassador, "Rochford's remarks to Stormont with regard to the Sieur Ainslie, to put you on your guard when he reaches Paris"; but the reply shows that the information had already been obtained: "Although the Sieur Ainslie has been proposed by the Lord Rochford . . . it seems probable that this post will be confided to one St. Paul,[1] who has been in the service of Your Majesty as a Colonel. I know

[1] Horace St. Paul, a member of an old north-country family, was born in 1725, and was exiled in 1751 on account of a duel. Entering the service of the Emperor, he served with distinction in the Imperial Armies, and was created a Count of the Holy Roman Empire in 1759. He eventually resigned, and, obtaining the pardon of King George, was made Secretary to the British Embassy in Paris in 1772, through the influence of Lord Stormont. In 1776 he was sent as Envoy Extraordinary to Sweden. He died at Ewart House, Northumberland, in April, 1812.

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that the Lord Stormont asked for the said St. Paul, who has for colleagues the Sieur de Churchill and the Lord Klenbrassil,[1] who will assuredly meet with no success. I return herewith the letter of the Lord Rochford which it has pleased Y.M. to confide to me. . . ."

Lord Rochford withdrew his candidate in favour of Lord Stormont's friend, who proved an excellent selection. He acted as *chargé d'affaires* during the ambassador's rather prolonged absences in London and Scotland.

Colonel St. Paul's secret notes are instructive and interesting. Five names of members of the Corps Diplomatique he labelled "cautious and no sort of confidence whatever." Marquis Caraccioli (Naples) was pronounced to be "not ill-informed, and sometimes worth cultivating"; Comte d'Argenteau, *i.e.* d'Argenteuil (Parma), "well-informed"; and last, though not least, Comte Merci (Argenteau), Imperial Ambassador, "best informed of any of the Foreign Ministers." At Fontainebleau they lived in hired houses, or, in the case of those who were ill-provided with money—as the unfortunate Baron de Goltz, whose official debts the great Frederick declined to defray—in furnished lodgings in the town.

At the Duke d'Aiguillon's on Sunday last, Count Merci after the dinner had a long conference with him apart, in which it very clearly appeared to me they differed in opinion. Count Merci pressed something very strongly which the Duke did not seem to adopt, and I believe they separated not much pleased with each other. The Duke retired to his cabinet without joining the company again, manifestly to avoid entering into conversation with any other person who might have anything to say to him.[2]

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[1] Clanbrassil, an extinct peerage.

[2] *Colonel St. Paul, of Ewart: Soldier and Diplomat*, by George Grey Butler (James Nesbit & Co., London, 2 vols., 1911).

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The "certain credit" in England on which he plumed himself was, as Mercy shrewdly suspected, of a rather nebulous kind. Aiguillon unofficially presented Colonel Blaquière with a curious parting gift in the form of a memorandum on the respective merits, claims, and status of the British and French East India Companies, very much to the detriment of the first. The Secretary of State for the Southern Department secretly dictated the reply to the retiring First Secretary, who had reached London. "Had the character of the Duc d'Aiguillon not been so well known," he wrote, of course in French, "we might have supposed he had composed this memoir with the sole purpose of insulting us, which, however, cannot be. It must, therefore, be intended as a menace. Such a document, ministerially presented, could only be regarded as a declaration of war"; and, in cipher to Colonel St. Paul, Lord Rochford referred to the memorial and its writer as "as extraordinary a performance as ever issued from the pen of the most insolent French Minister that ever existed."[1] On his next visit the new Secretary found Aiguillon very embarrassed, and shy almost to speechlessness. Partially recovering, he "praised very much our generous manner of doing them justice upon every complaint," adding "qu'on n'avait qu'à se louer de nous"—of which, let us hope, he accepted just as much as it suited him to do.

But even Mercy's diplomacy was strained to the uttermost at the New Year's Day reception of 1773, when nothing could have been more stiff and repellent than the wilful little Archduchess—a striking contrast to Louis-Auguste, who, acting on her instructions, talked for the first time to du Barry, to the amazement of every one. Upon

[1] *Colonel St. Paul, of Ewart: Soldier and Diplomat.*

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this the Machiavellian Mercy persuaded the favourite that all her gratitude was due to the Dauphine, if not for ignoring her, at least for procuring for her the suffrages of the heir to the throne. All this so affected du Barry, who, if she was vulgar, worthless, and rather silly, was not bad-hearted, and nourished a great admiration for Comte de Mercy, that she sent by him a humble message of "respectful gratitude" to the girl who hated the very sound of her name. But Aiguillon was not so easily reckoned with, secretly embittered as he was by the false position in which his wife had put herself in the eyes of her future Queen.

"Je n'en fus pas quitte à si bon marché," remarked one who was quite prepared for unpleasantness. The Minister's tirade ended with: "It seemed as though the Dauphine was determined to set the King at defiance, by her manner of treating those he most affectioned."

Often as the Foreign Minister had seen the velvet glove, he had perhaps hardly realised the existence of the iron hand beneath. He felt it now.

Comte de Mercy replied that he had been perfectly frank in desiring to do all in his power to promote peace and propriety at Court; that his representations, due to his Sovereign's commands, had always tended to that end; but he could no longer conceal from him (Aiguillon) that it was equally unjust and absurd to try to thrust all the endless disagreeables ("l'odiosité des misères") that took place on to the Dauphine, "who would be well within her rights if she insisted on following the example set her by the Dauphin and his aunts." He added a commentary on the past, and asserted boldly that they had every reason to be satisfied with the Dauphine, instead of running the risk of driving her to open revolt by complaining of

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her without any cause whatever; "in which case," he added significantly, "I shall not hesitate to inform the King of every word that I had just spoken to him (Aiguillon)." That unpleasant person, whose position was thoroughly insecure, like many other bullies of his kind, became thoroughly alarmed at a prospect which even he could see was no vain threat. It has been said that in order to render a certain kind of enemy harmless he should be crushed, not propitiated. It would have saved Marie-Antoinette much pain and sorrow in the future had Comte de Mercy seen his way to adopting such a course. A century or two earlier he would probably have done so. Altering his tone to a very soft and friendly voice, Aiguillon proceeded to praise the graces of the Dauphine, to foretell the boundless influence she would possess if only she would take a little more trouble, etc., etc., at which, outwardly suave and impenetrable as usual, we may imagine Comte de Mercy smiled inwardly, for his account to Kaunitz ended with: "Circumstances here give me so little play, and the miserable man with whom I have to deal exacts too many precautions not to force me to proceed very slowly."

The Chancellor thoroughly agreed, observing:—

> Meanwhile, I see with pleasure that you trounced your man well over the Dauphine. As a matter of fact, nothing is more revolting than all they exact from that amiable princess, while the King submits to be defied every day by his own children, who have never been induced by him or the Ministers to see reason.

Prince Kaunitz felt strongly how unreasonable this attitude was. He had employed forcible terms in expressing to his friend and pupil the "absurdity of attributing all that went wrong to young princesses without experience, whose

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husbands alone possessed any authority, and should bear the blame." He had long ago lost patience at the endless complaints from Paris of the behaviour of Archduchess Marie-Amélie, less perhaps on account of the legitimate reproaches showered upon her, than the total exclusion of her husband, Louis XV.'s grandson, whose own proceedings were even more reprehensible than could be excused on the ground of his six years' inferiority in age to his imperious, managing wife. "I hope," concluded the Chancellor wrathfully on that occasion, "the Duc de Choiseul will so manage that we hear no more uproar about a few imprudences that these young princesses may commit. They cannot possibly deserve our learning here that they are being made known all the world over as little she-devils."

One at least merited no such description. The ambassador found the Dauphine quite prepared to bring the battery of her blandishments to bear on the unattractive old King; she would even go a step further, and if "Mercy" really considered it necessary she would talk civilly and at some length to the Duc d'Aiguillon, for whom she had unfortunately "conceived a horror that defies description"; but—and it was a large but—she drew the line at du Barry. In partial extenuation of her attitude she pleaded the "increasing horror" which Louis-Auguste on his side expressed for "la créature," and hinted at his displeasure were she to depart from the rule he had made for himself. The Dauphin kept out of a complicated affair in which Madame Adelaide, incited by Madame de Narbonne, tried to involve everybody all round, and said drily to his elderly relative—"My dear aunt, I advise you not to interfere in the intrigues of Monsieur d'Aiguillon, for he is a *mauvais sujet*." Why pray, the Dauphine inquired, should she be asked to do

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what neither he nor her aunts had ever been induced to attempt?

Why indeed?

Had the unfortunate ambassador been possessed of merely average intelligence, he would probably have been at his wits' end, a consummation not easily reached by such a long head as his. Having exhausted his most specious arguments, he now proceeded to delve in the recesses of a theology which had perhaps grown rather rusty since the days of the Turin Academy. Could it possibly be becoming or right, he inquired, for the King's own children to remind him that he was pursuing courses which those who had his welfare at heart could not sufficiently deplore? Did not H.R.H. recollect how Holy Writ itself recorded the special benedictions bestowed on those among the sons of Noah who, refusing to join in mockery of their parent's deviation from the paths of sobriety, concealed with a mantle the infirmities of that patriarch from the public gaze? The Archduchess may or may not have been suitably impressed by these theological flights. Her deep religious feeling was unaffected until many years of bad example, and influences at the most susceptible age, temporarily obscured the result of early training. If the comparison of the old King to Noah failed to appeal to her ready sense of the ridiculous, Mercy was less impressive in the unaccustomed rôle of a dignitary of the Church than an Abbé de Beauvais, who was creating a great sensation at Versailles, where his sermons combined, as Marie-Antoinette wrote to her mother, "the good morals of the Gospels with a number of home-truths for all."

At the same time the following autograph letter from the Empress to her faithful servant was received and read aloud:—

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Nothing is more obscure than the affairs of Sweden: I hope more than I foresee that the King may maintain himself in the present system without war. I fear his youth, desire to make a name for himself, the promptings of France to precipitate events, are not for his good. Those of the King of Prussia are only too clear. He will loosen his hold only to tighten it on Danzig and Thorn,[1] which will be forced to turn to him. What is incomprehensible is that even Russia agrees and caused us to lose valuable time in dawdling ("en lanternant") and in cajoling us, while a remedy still remained: they have indeed led us by the nose, and I am inconsolable. If I could find any consolation it would consist in my having always been averse to this iniquitous partition—so inequitable—and to allying ourselves with those two monsters,—even at the risk of declaring war, which I have cause to abhor, and more at this time than ever, on account of the constitution of our military armaments. But I thought the same two and a half years ago. Since then, the failure of harvests, mortality, the extreme misery of our countries so broke me down that I gave in—but much against my own convictions. I only hope the Monarchy may not feel the effects after I cease to exist; and I am willing to support the actual discomforts and the loss of my reputation, which is not trifling, provided that this falls on my unhappy person that will descend soon to (the tomb of) my ancestors, broken as I am by trouble, unsupported at an age at which one most needs help. This cannot last: and I even regard that time as welcome, hoping in the mercy of God and in the basis of my intentions which are only known to that Supreme Being. And believe me, always your very affectionate . . .[2]

Folding the sheet, the reader launched forth into a recital of the difficulties and anxieties of the Empress's life, producing such an effect on the poor little Dauphine that she burst into tears, and "sobbed so bitterly that I remained dumbfounded," added the kindly mentor, who was perhaps little less moved than she.

[1] At the second Partition of Poland (1793) Danzig and Thorn, previously declared independent, were made over to Prussia.

[2] Empress Maria Theresa to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, February 1, 1773.

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Even if that were so, it is remarkable how little real affection Marie-Antoinette met with in the days of her strange girlhood. There seems to have been no one in her adopted country who was prepared to lavish on a lonely foreigner in her teens that special quality of unselfish love the recollection of which—Heaven be praised for it!—remains with so many of us in after-life as the most priceless possession of our youth. In his diffident, clumsy manner Louis-Auguste was fond of and admired the lively little bride provided for him by his grandfather and Choiseul; Louis-Philippe found that her spirits and keen desire to enjoy life made her a more amusing companion than his own rather morose Josèphe-Louise, whose father's envoy, Comte de Viry, enlarged in his letters to Turin on the effect he hoped, rather than saw, that his particular princess was producing in France. I have often thought with amusement of the indignation his accounts would have aroused at the Austrian Embassy had they been read there—as, indeed, it is possible some actually were.

Mercy's able biographer,[1] unusually qualified to speak, pronounces that astute personage rather cold-natured. It is certain that he was before everything else admirably adapted to the profession he had chosen, and that, cautious and calculating, Madame Elisabeth's "vieux renard" never for a single instant lost sight of some ulterior object. It was perhaps strange that he should have found himself invested with the charge of one who was exceptionally warm-hearted—a creature of impulse, nervous, highly-strung and impressionable—uncertain and flighty, too, as such natures are apt to be. It speaks volumes for Mercy's ability that his efforts to comprehend a nature so different from his own should have been crowned with success. "There

[1] Comte de Pimodan.

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is no one," he was able to say with great truth later on, "who knows the Queen's character as I do—having for years made it my sole study." But he seems to have found time for a good many other studies besides.

He could not be persuaded to marry. In a manner, quite peculiar to herself and subtly compounded of attachment and command, the Empress pointed out to her faithful servant the personal nature of the loss the extinction of his family would be to her, her children, and the Empire; on more than one occasion Prince Kaunitz returned to the charge in the quasi-paternal, semi-bantering tone it pleased him to adopt; and from the Low Countries the Duc de Coorswarem-Looz enlarged on the advantages of an alliance with either of the turbulent Madame de Brionne's daughters. Further, while Mercy's many friends in Austria sang the praises of a young Princess Lichtenstein, nearer his old home, his only near relative, Canon d'Argenteau, spent his spare time in compiling a list of eligible young ladies—headed by a Mademoiselle de Grosebeck, possessed of a fortune of sixty thousand Brabant florins safely invested in broad lands. The response was not encouraging:—

> I have explained myself on what regards a marriage in the future; that state for which I feel neither repugnance nor inclination exacts reflection, active measures, even risks. It is asserted that marriages are made in heaven, which I am inclined to believe: in the character of a worthy and respected ecclesiastic you are even more competent than others to judge of the truth of the assertion. It is reassuring, for the reason that, in the event of my finding myself inscribed on those pages, I should relegate to Providence the responsibility of inspiration at the critical moment. Your wise counsels can only add, etc., etc.

We may hope that his "dear uncle" possessed that highly-cultivated sense of humour which

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apparently alone enables us to surmount so many of the trials, the bitter disappointments (with the unnecessary aggravations, as we deem them) of life. The above effusion was carefully placed by its recipient among a number from the same correspondent, starting with a ceremonious letter from Vienna, written in a large round hand, that had evidently cost the ten-year-old writer a great deal of trouble—foretaste of a strenuous after-life. These letters still survive, with their yellow paper and faded ink, in a packet labelled by the Canon with the single word "Florimond." That name was seldom heard by its owner, for, as we know, the ideal "Madame l'Ambassadrice" never appeared to fill the part of hostess in the Petit Luxembourg, or later on in the gilded salons of the fine hôtel built for his friend by Monsieur de la Borde—"near the new Boulevards"—in the angle formed by the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, now Rue Drouot.[1]

The domestic side of Comte de Mercy's life could have satisfied none of those who cared for him, represented as it unfortunately was for over twenty years by an Opera singer of the lowest extraction—neither pretty nor charming, but sufficiently talented, with her short figure and soprano voice of mediocre calibre, to create among others the rôle of "l'Amour" in Gluck's *Orphée*, and of "Armide" in the *Renaud* of Piccini, and to hold her own against her rivals until overstrained vocal chords and failing health paved the way for the stage supremacy of the young and lovely Madame St. Huberty. Prince Kaunitz is said to have been indirectly responsible for the original meeting; his

[1] This hôtel, originally a long low building, still survives beneath a towering erection of more recent additions. The street is now Boulevard Montmartre, and the rooms in which the ambassador entertained his friends, and dictated or penned those interminable reports to the Empress, are now part of a club.

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letters to his "cher Comte" about 1769–70 are chiefly devoted to some rather extensive requirements for the theatre in Vienna, and the replies of an overworked ambassador show no disposition to waste his scanty leisure in haunting green-rooms with a view to personal enjoyment.

If Rosalie Levassur's influence originated in a vulgar caprice, it lasted long enough to become a habit to which time lent a spurious dignity.[1] Comte de Mercy found no leisure, supposing the inclination ever existed, to break the connection, and in his will he alluded gratefully to her devotion and her unremitting attentions to one whose delicate health necessitated the utmost care. Whether or no the *liaison* partook of the nature of what is called in France "le secret de Polichinelle" —in other words, a secret that everybody knows— it is certain that it was carried on with a regard for "les convenances" extremely rare at the time, and conspicuously absent from the scandals resulting from the proceedings of certain members of the Corps Diplomatique. To take two of the first examples that occur, we may cite the extravagance of the great Comte d'Aranda's admiration of one Cléophile, also of the Opera, and an Englishman's attentions to the Italian dancer, Bacelli, whose stage costume was apparently considered lacking in distinction without the addition of the Order of the Garter, the property of the British Ambassador.

That Marie-Antoinette was well posted by some incautious members of her indiscreet suite, or by the Comte de Provence, in the details of her mentor's private life, there can be little doubt. The amusement caused her by some of his homilies pierces through the stilted phrases in which he

[1] The probabilities of the existence of a secret marriage were fully discussed in the columns of a French "Notes and Queries" some years ago. Nothing, however, was proved one way or the other.

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reports her speeches, to which at different times the Empress replies: "My daughter has, as a matter of fact, plenty of cleverness and wit"; and again, "My daughter is indeed clever at sketching portraits: I only wish it would induce her to derive advantages in regulating her conduct according to her knowledge of character." To all outward appearance Comte de Mercy was as decorous as he was cautious and ceremonious: a diplomatist and a *grand seigneur* before everything else, with a certain austere simplicity he could well afford. He regarded himself as a "Flamand," for, although the Empress and her children all called him "Mercy," he invariably informed the innumerable petitioners of that name who bombarded him with requests after he became famous, that his own patronymic was "Argenteau": and he turned a deaf ear to his uncle's suggestion that the "mantle" of a prince would add lustre to the coronet on his official seal.

While he rented the Petit Luxembourg[1] from its owner, Prince de Condé, Rosalie Levasseur, otherwise Marie Rose Tournay, occupied apartments in the Rue des Bons Enfants, in the vicinity of the Palais Royal and the new Opera, whence she removed to a house rented from Baron de Breteuil in the Rue des Fossoyeurs. On the migration, about 1777, of the Imperial Embassy, the identity of the owner of another building, by Monsieur de la Borde, in the Rue de Provence, remained a mystery until some indiscreet draftsman inscribed in large letters on a plan of the new *quartier*—"house of Mademoiselle Rosalie." A country residence called Chennevières,

[1] Next to the Grand Luxembourg, the Petit Luxembourg still remains, in the Rue de Vaugirard, and is the official residence of the President of the Senate. During its occupation by the Imperial Ambassador, two of his compatriots from the Netherlands, the Duc d'Ursel and Baron de Geer de Hervè, wrote enthusiastically of their host's hospitality and of the magnificence of his house and furniture.

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near Conflans-Saint-Honorine, was also placed at her disposal: but she put in no appearance at the ambassador's Château de Neuville, about three miles off, purchased from a Marquis de Castellane on account of its proximity to Versailles, and with due regard for the excellent shooting afforded by the property.

Du Barry, poor wretched creature, left no stone unturned to get herself noticed. The new Mistress of the Robes, the Duchesse de Cossé, added fuel to the flames of controversy by declining to fall in with the views of her husband, the eldest son of the old Duc de Brissac, entirely given over to the *parti dominant*. Monsieur de Cossé had devised for his son, aged two, an adaptation of the uniform of the Hundred Swiss, in which he was brought by his mother from Paris to Versailles by special request of the Dauphine, who, immensely amused, took the baby-soldier to pay his respects to the old princesses, and, as they all secretly hoped, to the King also. The last, however, was ensconced in du Barry's apartments overhead; and as that worthy declined to receive the little boy without his mother, who in her turn said that nothing would induce her to mount those dark and narrow stairs with such an object in view, the presentation was indefinitely postponed. Soon after, an invitation to a supper in honour of du Barry, given by the Duc de la Vrillière, was curtly declined by the Duchesse de Cossé, who told her infatuated husband she would rather resign her place at Court than expose herself to such obligations. That absurd person, anxious to right himself with his chosen friends, announced that his wife had only acted by command of the Dauphine, who, as inquiry proved, knew nothing whatever about it! Then uprose the ambassador, published the facts, and lectured Madame de Cossé

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at some length on the absolute necessity of caution, and above all on that of never quoting a real or fancied opinion of the young princess in any occurrence, however apparently trivial or insignificant—a fundamental maxim for the direction of any member of a Royal household, which seems to have been generally ignored. The Dauphine's indiscretions were quite enough in themselves, without any assistance from outside. She was ineradicably indiscreet, most of all from the point of view of her own interests; and she was provided, as we have seen, with no safe companions of her own age. She talked sometimes to Comte de Mercy of her suite—including those composing the "under-service," and he took great pains to point out the importance of knowing "those people" thoroughly, their characters, interests, and views, with the object of checking impressions which the several interests of each might dispose them to endeavour to convey:—

All that I can do to augment and sustain the credit of Comtesse de Noailles avails little, as a result of the extreme ineptitude of this lady, who, with sufficiently straightforward views, has none of the requisite talents for making these valued. I formed a plan by which she could have attracted the Dauphine to her every evening: a project which only occasionally succeeded, but which might have turned into a daily habit had she had the address to amuse the Archduchess and spare her the tiresome remarks to which the aforesaid Comtesse is only too much addicted.

And a few weeks later:—

I can say with certitude that, with the exception of the Dauphin, the Abbé de Vermond and I are alone among those whom the Dauphine honours with her confidence. The Comtesse de Noailles would have been in a position to obtain it, had she known how to take the advice I gave her at the beginning; but this lady, with little wit and character, could hardly hope to succeed with a young princess so gifted with fine perceptions as the Archduchess.

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Later, he permitted himself to be convinced that Marie-Antoinette had adopted and acted on his advice to keep every one, especially the "under-service," in their places—no easy task; and he asked her rather slyly whether the First Woman of the Bedchamber still considered herself in a position (as she had done two years before) to give balls in her apartment, and in defiance of inexorable etiquette to solicit the Dauphine's presence at these entertainments? Smiling and colouring, she replied ingenuously, "Don't speak of it! I feel so ashamed when I think of it."

In spite of drawbacks, Comte de Mercy considered her household

incontestably the least ill-arranged of them all. Those who compose it are attached to her: but each one, with certain good qualities, tinges his or her behaviour with more or less of that envy, jealousy, and intrigue that is the moving spirit of everything in this country. Comtesse de Noailles, without talents or cleverness, and perhaps without great drawbacks, has that of being fidgety, jealous, and not very exact in her reports. The Duchesse de Cossé, with agreeable attributes, high-mindedness, gaiety, and honesty, has the fault of talking too much without reflection: she is, nevertheless, adapted to please the Dauphine very much more than Madame de Noailles. I perceived that the very marked taste of the Dauphine for Madame de Cossé must bring about a very lively state of dissension between the lady of honour and the *dame d'atours*; and the disunion between these two personages in chief could not fail to start a war among the whole service. I thought it my duty to make representations to the Archduchess, to which she deigned to listen, and the *tracasseries* ceased.

Madame du Barry continued to use every means in her power to attract the Dauphine's attention. These efforts were not crowned with success, and the ambassador's relief must have been very great when, during a long conversation with her early in 1778, he found her

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much calmer. She devoted all her complaints to the surroundings of the Dauphine, and especially to her aunts, whereupon, assuring her that the goodness of the Dauphine's character was not susceptible of any feeling of hatred, he left it at that, and after this date the ignoble figure of du Barry vanishes from these pages.

The Dauphine's worst enemy could not deny that she was extremely anxious to further her mother's wishes, and to understand what was specially required of her. She succeeded in giving satisfaction in all respects but one to two very dissimilar people. "Mercy is much pleased at the way in which you grasp affairs of business," wrote the Empress, who was not a little gratified by the intelligence that the King was gradually acquiring a habit of singling out his grandson's wife in order to discourse to her on serious subjects, which as a rule he was understood to eschew in the society of the female members of his family. The cautious Mercy was not likely to attribute too much importance to these developments at the outset, and he closely questioned his charge as to her grandfather's manner in private, with a view to gauging the motives of that insincere personage. She at once related that Louis XV. had remarked, apparently as a joke, "We must not talk about the affairs of Poland before you, because your family are not of the same way of thinking as ourselves." And another day he said, laughing, "The Emperor wants to oppose what is being done in Sweden: this will make a breach between us, and I shall have to send you back to Vienna," whereupon he proceeded to embrace the Dauphine with effusion—an attention which it is to be hoped she appreciated. All this was detailed to the Empress, and more briefly to Prince Kaunitz, to whom, however, a further remark of Louis XV. was

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reported, for after his last speech he added: "The Chancellor has had a very extraordinary conversation with Prince Louis de Rohan—not, however, referring to politics." With uncommon presence of mind the Archduchess replied simply "that she had always understood the Empress was accustomed to regard Prince Kaunitz as a great Minister, whose views were far-reaching and whose opinions always received her fullest attention."

That statesman hastened to record his appreciation of these flattering utterances :—

> I was charmed with the answer of the Dauphine to the King: apart from its being honouring to myself I found it very judicious and full of sense, which seems to me a most hopeful augury for the future of that charming princess. . . . Meanwhile I must confess to you that I understand nothing in connection with the King's remark, seeing that as regards my mode of procedure with our frivolous Coadjutor I do not suppose I have ever told him anything worth repeating, from which I conclude it to be highly probable he composed some fable in order to render his letter more interesting.[1]

The letters addressed to the Dauphine by her mother became more interesting also about this time from the point of view of that young lady, for they contained fewer homilies and even touched on matters of public interest. Maria Theresa regretted, "out of consideration for France,"[2] certain proceedings of the French Government with England. She thought these resembled "the same humiliating part that we, unluckily, played in the case of the King of Prussia. There is, however, a vast difference: France has the sea between and her frontier well guarded—while we have the King of Prussia at our doors, without one fortified place beyond that wretched Olmütz."

[1] November 14, 1772.

[2] Not a word for England which, alone with Holland, had stood by the young Queen of Hungary in 1740.

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The Dauphine had at this time a very poor opinion of the British nation (Protestant, too, like "le Sieur Hume"): "The King of Prussia is personally a very bad neighbour: but the English will always be the same for France, and for all time the sea has not prevented their doing her much harm." Mercifully, this prophecy has proved to be incorrect.

When the Empress's repeated request that some distinction should be conferred on Monsieur de Durfort remained unheeded for four years, and was finally carried through by an intrigue, she observed that she was glad to see no examples of such "manigances" at her Court. In this category she doubtless placed many other occurrences:—

> My daughter would no doubt be better advised in treating the favourite like any other perfectly indifferent woman who has been presented . . . and I find this affectation of never speaking a single word very strange: but as I have repeated to you very often, either through caprice or nonchalance, she has no wish to make efforts about objects that are repugnant to her.

Then, in autograph on the margin, "She might even be pig-headed."

It is not likely that this letter was read out loud, and even so Marie-Antoinette was far too respectful about her mother to point out to "Mercy," who could not with truth have denied any such proposition, that no one was less likely than the Empress to tolerate a du Barry. In theory Maria Theresa advised quiescence, but she had, and could have, no experience of a face-to-face encounter with such an one as the *ci-devant* Mademoiselle Bécu. With the *flair* of the born politician triumphing over those primary instincts which her daughter had inherited in so marked a

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degree, it was easy to enjoin a policy of blindness in a situation of which Maria Theresa could really know nothing.

The girl's own conclusion was very sound: "If the Empress saw all that goes on here she would forgive me—no patience could possibly hold out."

But if Maria Theresa—autocrat as she was—could form no accurate picture of much that was accepted at the Court of Louis XV., she belied none of her own characteristic power of gauging men and things within the limits of her own observation. The frightful risks that lay at the root of the matter were ignored or minimised only in writing to one from whom their very existence must be concealed at all costs. Mercy, had he been at liberty to speak, could have testified to his Sovereign's conviction of certain perils encompassing the daily existence of a wholly inexperienced girl, and influencing the parent's judgment even to the detriment of her own child. At the outset of 1772 the Empress dictated to Neny:—

VIENNA, *4th January*.—Comte de Mercy, I have received both your letters of 15th. Their contents enable me to see equally clearly the pains you take to be of use to my daughter and her own critical situation. With sorrow I recognise all its dangers: and I can only repeat what I have already reiterated on this subject, placing meanwhile all my confidence in your enlightened views and zeal. Your task is, indeed, a hard one, especially in view of the nonchalance and levity of my daughter (and a little obstinacy [1]), accustomed as she is to content herself with the pleasures of the moment without considering the result. This, however, is only another reason for redoubling your efforts, without allowing yourself to be discouraged by the difficulties you may encounter.[2]

[1] This addition is in the Empress's own hand.

[2] Empress Maria Theresa to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, January 4, 1772.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE VOICE FROM VIENNA

EARLY in the winter of 1802, Miss Mary Berry, the favourite of Mr. Walpole's "two Strawberries," visited scenes in and near Paris which she had known many years before under very different circumstances. "The forest of Fontainebleau," she wrote, "with all the beech trees turned to gold by the season, and with all the birches still in leaf hanging over the odd masses of rock, was beautiful beyond expression."

It probably looked much the same thirty years before, when the pedestrians saw a slight figure riding through its woodland glades in the gorgeous full dress of the King's hunt, followed by two equerries and by a whole cavalcade of grooms in royal liveries.

Comte de Mercy was installed as usual in a house he hired in the town, whence he paid constant visits to his Embassy in Paris, and at all times kept a watchful eye, either in person or by proxy, on the Archduchess. Vermond hated Fontainebleau, where he encountered increased difficulties in the discharge of duties already painful and onerous enough. Comte de Mercy wrote:—

On the 5th the Dauphine went out riding and joined the stag-hunt: H.R.H. was dressed in full-dress hunting

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uniform. This costume gave infinite pleasure to the King, who was much occupied with her, and seemed highly satisfied with the novel description of dress she had devised.

And shortly before :—

On 14th (Oct.) H.R.H. rode with the intention of going to meet the stag-hunt. The Archduchess fancies by means of these promenades she risks no failure as regards the engagement not to hunt regularly. This, nevertheless, is what it amounts to: but with as few drawbacks as possible—due either to the moderation and precautions to which she lends herself, or to her good seat and the skill with which she handles her horse. That day the horse on which she was mounted stumbled badly on a path where several large stones were concealed by the sand: the Dauphine was quite undisturbed, and held him up in such a manner that no accident resulted.

The Empress and the ambassador both appeared to consider that a definite promise had been made. But one at least seems never to have taken into account the difference between any such, voluntarily given, and grudging obedience to an order which could not be discussed or gainsaid. Soon after her arrival, her mother had written in one of her early letters :—

I take you at your word, in which a great princess cannot fail. . . . Repeat these words and promises—"I will never ride out hunting." I accept the offer you make me, and on that understanding alone will try to calm myself: but no excuses or subterfuges.

The reply to this letter contains no allusion to the subject, nor is the least trace of any such promise to be found in Marie-Antoinette's letters. It may possibly have been written in one of those that (notably in the year 1770) are not forthcoming. As we know, several of these childish little scrawls were returned in original for Mercy's anxious inspection, and by him destroyed by command. A few others were not included in the publications of

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Ritter von Arneth and M. Geffroy. But even conceding that such a promise had been extracted, was it a fair concession to demand? Was the Empress really justified in issuing such a stringent mandate after she had been assured by Mercy himself that the King and Dauphin, to whose judgment she professed to defer, had given the project every possible encouragement? There is much to be said on both sides.

Maria Theresa's objections were founded, as they always would be, on common-sense and on the best information that the faculty were in a position to give. The tone of the day and the prevalent mode of regarding certain questions must always be taken into account, otherwise it would be impossible to comprehend many attitudes of mind. It should be recalled that up to seventy or eighty years ago or later, it was not the fashion for a lady—royal or otherwise—to take exercise: she was not supposed to require any, and those who thought differently were regarded with a certain amount of surprise and mistrust. It is not possible to imagine the Empress's sensations could she behold a modern girl of fifteen or so, clad in male garments, flying a Leicestershire double or negotiating a stile with a big drop into a high-road. She once alluded to hunting in talking to an Englishwoman, observing that "the Emperor had seen ladies in England taking bigger jumps than the men themselves."[1]

Mercy objected then and later, on the reasonable grounds of the "unsuitable positions in which the Archduchess might find herself placed," reverting to his constant theme: "There remains also the inconvenience of that familiarity to which the French

[1] It is questionable whether the Empress would have been even gratified could she have taken a peep into futurity and seen a subject of her own winning our Grand National.

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are more disposed than any other nation in the world." He was profoundly shocked a few years later when he found the Queen of France in a race-stand on the Plaine des Sablons,[1] the centre of a vociferating crowd of *jeunesse dorée*, who, headed by Lauzun, had changed their powdered hair and velvet coats covered with ribbons and orders for cropped heads and "fracs à l'Anglais." Comte de Mercy's sporting proclivities were restricted to shooting; this "imitation des courses qui se font en Angleterre" he summarised as a "mince spectacle," and was amazed when the Comte d'Artois "ran about encouraging his postilions or jaquets"; adding a postscript for the further information of the Empress, "This is what they call those who ride racehorses."

Across the water King George and Queen Charlotte attended Egham Races in a "chaise," drawn up during an interval into an adjacent hedgerow, while their Majesties ate their luncheon of cold beef and apple-pie in full view of an admiring crowd. To the feelings of delighted loyalty these proceedings evoked there is abundant testimony, and it does not appear that any unseemly familiarity resulted.

Gay and charming France was, however, very different, and it is comprehensible that Comte de Mercy dreaded any increase in his responsibilities as regarded a fascinating princess, supported only by a semi-imbecile, senile old man, or a young one, who at this stage of his career was hardly better calculated to inspire confidence or respect.

The possibilities of the risks which Comte de Mercy was the first to take into account, and, indeed, of which he had constant ocular demonstration, must have occurred to the experienced

[1] The Plaine des Sablons was north of the Bois de Boulogne, covering ground afterwards occupied by a town or village called Sablonville.

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Empress, who more than once alluded to her inability to comprehend a great deal that she had had no opportunity of seeing for herself. It is, therefore, doubly surprising, as it was regrettable, that she never realised the danger of perpetually laying embargoes on innocent pleasures, and of opposing almost every natural and harmless bent, instead of adopting the wise course of substituting some adequate occupation or form of relaxation for those that seem to have been invariably, and, alas, unwisely condemned. If the girl was goaded into momentary impatience, it would be hard for any one possessed of the most rudimentary knowledge of young people and their ways to feel any surprise. There is not one single instance of any reasonable proposition being suggested that could have taken Marie-Antoinette's mind off the harassing problem of Louis-Auguste, the difficulties of her own position, or the limitations of a narrow, restricted existence, in which it would have been hard, indeed, for any young creature to grow and expand in desirable directions. Her keen wish to possess a small country house of her own, in which she might have enjoyed brief respites from the tiresome routine of palace life, was treated as a childish whim and ignored altogether. Yet it was founded on instinct and common sense.

"I am glad she amuses herself with music and dancing," wrote her mother, "she must do something." It was a thousand pities that the Empress did not take this truth to heart, instead of adopting such a tone as this :—

I was very sorry to hear that you broke your word to me, and that you rode after the hunt. It was on this condition, always in fear and trembling, that I agreed to your continuing to take this exercise: your silence on the point causes me double pain: you can easily judge that what a thousand people

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see cannot remain a secret. I have told you before that it is astonishing what people know here about the Court and its interior. All the letters from Paris and Versailles are full of you and your prudent and amiable behaviour to your sister-in-law;[1] but what I prefer to all this is what Mercy tells me and his tribute to you.

The poor little delinquent replied piteously :—

I am in despair that Your Majesty can suppose I have failed to keep my word as to hunting on horseback: I only went once to the stag-hunt, which I did not even follow well.

The Empress's comment to Mercy proves how uncompromising her attitude was :—

I own to you I was rather troubled at your report: my daughter may well be as little to be believed in the confidences she makes to you as she is to me in the matter of hunting. I do not say that this is so; but she persists in putting her own interpretation, which shows a character not true, and which, joined to the diabolical intrigues of that Court, might become very dangerous.

If we feel inclined to blame Mercy for having called down this hailstorm on the Dauphine's devoted head, we must recollect that even had he thought it consistent with his duty to his Sovereign to suppress his account, the "Gazettes" would have enlightened the Empress's advisers, over and above the letters of the many who watched Marie Antoinette as cats do a mouse, and wrote to Vienna all that they saw, and a good deal that they imagined.[2] But, at least, he spared no pains to be just, and he is nowhere more emphatic than in refuting any

[1] Comtesse de Provence.

[2] For obvious reasons the names of those to whom Marie-Antoinette attributed the responsibility for telling tales and making a certain amount of mischief is suppressed here. It is morally impossible she should not have known that "the Gazettes," of which the Empress wrote, was another name for Mercy and Vermond. The mere fact that the latter had received permission to correspond direct with Maria Theresa was enough in itself to attract attention to everything he said and did.

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imputation on his charge's sincerity. Over and over again he repeated, "As in no single case have I ever found the smallest deviation or dissimulation on the part of the Archduchess, I am perfectly positive she has told me the exact truth." How, it may be asked, could she, had she been even twice as clever as she was, have thrown dust in such keen eyes as his? It must be remembered that in his absence she was watched by his spies, headed by Vermond, at every moment of the day. On this occasion Mercy replied :—

The Archduchess has a very open nature. With her dissimulation is painful and difficult, but where serious subjects are in question, she has an extreme fear of being compromised, and this apprehension renders her more circumspect than her age and vivacity would lead one to expect.

She would not be the first girl, or boy either, who has been frightened into an appearance—what is so much better described in France as a *faux air*—of slyness which the apparent offender would be the first to denounce.

Maria Theresa's reply to her daughter was sent in duplicate to Mercy, evidently from the mistaken idea that the possibility of double-dealing constituted a serious danger to be attended to without delay :—

Is it true, as I see by the Gazettes, that you ride hard out hunting? Still worse, that you have had a fall?

Having secured a promise, the Empress felt positive there was not a word of truth in it, but all the same she would like to know why the papers, etc., etc. There are no evasions in the reply :—

I suspect you have heard more about my cavalcades than really exists. I am going, my dear mamma, to tell you the whole truth. The King and Dauphin are pleased to see me on horseback. I do not say so because the whole world has remarked it, especially during the journey to Compiègne,

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where they were particularly pleased with my riding-habit. Although, I must confess, I have no trouble in conforming myself to their taste, I can, nevertheless, answer for never permitting myself to hunt in excess, and I hope that, in spite of my giddiness, I shall always accept the control of the sensible people who accompany me and never thrust myself into the hurly-burly ("et ne me fourrerai jamais dans la bagarre").[1] I should not have thought that what happened to me at Fontainebleau would have been taken for *an accident:* one occasionally comes across large pieces of granite in the forest; in one of these places, while mounting a little path, my horse did not see one of these stones, which was covered with sand; he slipped, by a movement I held him up, and continued my way.

Vermond had written *his* views to Monsieur de Mercy a year before, and one entire paragraph was incorporated by the latter in his own secret report. The Abbé wrote:—

Two "good" letters have been received. I had the delicious spectacle of the affection of the Dauphine for her august mother. . . . I examined the effect of the letters with great attention, and made a comparison with the former ones, in which the truth was told rather dryly. . . . All the Empress's letters have been received with respect, and, at least, as much fear. The bad tone of the surroundings, the habit of receiving neither remonstrances nor advice from the King or the Dauphin (the only responsible authorities), in short, the distance of 900 miles there, in my opinion, are the causes of the small effect of reprimands. Never had a mother so much right to speak with authority; I represented this several times at the moments of the letters causing pain. The principle was agreed to, but it is always supposed that one is little loved and will be treated as a child until the age of thirty. . . .

Had the Dauphine been inclined to insincerity, she would have had ample excuse in the example set her by the King and his daughters. Madame Adelaide, launching forth into unmeasured abuse of the absent Duc de Choiseul, whose firm supporter

[1] Marie-Antoinette wrote, "je ne me fourreraient," which was corrected in the 1874 edition of her letters.

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at the zenith of his prosperity she had professed herself to be, became suddenly conscious of her nieces's eyes fixed upon her with a look of amazed disapproval, which more sophisticated listeners would have been at some pains to conceal.

All the representations of the Empress and Mercy as to the importance of pleasing the old King did not prevent Marie-Antoinette telling him what she thought of him when he declined to put off a party of pleasure organised by himself and Madame du Barry, although Madame Victoire had been taken suddenly seriously ill.

"No doubt, Papa," said the Dauphine, "you will not go to St. Hubert while my aunt is in this state."

The affectionate parent hastened to intimate that the princess's indisposition was not sufficiently serious to cause any alteration in his plans.

"That, Papa, is not nice of you," returned the Dauphine candidly. And it is permissible to hope that Louis XV. felt very uncomfortable.

The sympathetic ambassador found her "greatly affected by the King's behaviour," and by "an insensibility" that shocked and grieved her "belle âme."

All her certainty of her child's amiable and peace-loving nature (even her enemies concede how she made peace in the Royal Family) was insufficient to appease the Empress when she fancied her duty called for severity.

Dating her letter on the "last day of the old year," she was uncompromising, melancholy, not at her best:—

> What you tell me as an excuse for having failed to keep your promise not to follow the hunt on horseback would have been all right had you told it me a year ago, or sooner, the first time you did so. Your candour and affection would have minimized the breaking of a promise; but I own to feeling the being left to hear it through the Gazettes,[1] and

[1] *I.e.* Comte de Mercy, which no one knew better than the Dauphine herself.

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this casts a shadow for the future over my confidence in you. . . . Why should I wish to deprive you of an innocent pleasure, I who would give my life to procure you any—did I not fear the consequences? Young people are always unmeasured in their amusements. I foresee you will be so also; (but) I have nothing more to say so long as the King and Dauphin approve . . .; what I feel is your silence. . . . The embarrassment with Esterhazy is another point I cannot pass over. How is this? The Antoinette who at twelve and thirteen knew how to receive her company so prettily, to say something graceful and charming to each; this can be attested by all Vienna, the Empire, Lorraine and France, while the Dauphine of to-day is embarrassed about a private individual! Do not accustom yourself to these frivolous excuses. Embarrassment, fear, misgivings—chimeras! It is only from bad habits that one allows oneself to go on without reflection, or putting oneself out for anything, when one makes these excuses. You know how your affability won all hearts. . . . I end my sermons with the old year; you would wrong me unless you look upon these as the greatest proof of my tenderness and the keen interest I take in your future welfare, with which I am continually occupied.

The reply was sad, too, almost stern on such young lips:—

You do indeed punish me for an omission; above all things put away that horrible reflection on my candour, it would be the misfortune of my life. I told you only the truth as to the approbation of the King and the Dauphin; I admit there is little merit in my acquiescence. I should not say I ride circumspectly had I not the testimony of my two equerries, who never leave me, and who are very serious and sensible persons.

She was more than usually troubled, and the Ambassador took great pains to explain what was required of her:—

I answered with respectful frankness that chances which one brings about as one desires to do, too strongly resemble the manipulation which should never be connected with the actions of a great princess, and that in small matters, as in more important ones, a straight course was always the most respectable and useful line to adopt. (I added) that I

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emphasized this aphorism with all the more pleasure that I knew how it is graven on the heart and engrained in H.R.H.'s character, and those opinions which have attached all honest people to her person. . . . I added that I had never remarked a tone of authority in Your Majesty's letters, but that which is natural to a tender mother who desires to be regarded by her cherished daughter as the best friend she possesses in the world: that the only return the Dauphine could make to a sentiment so priceless is by a confidence that knows no bounds . . . at this I saw the tears come into the eyes of the Archduchess. She observed with charming *naïveté*, "I have not got a thought in my mind that I would not confide to my mother, but writing troubles me, and I am afraid of worrying her by telling her things all wrong (*de travers*)."

We may suspect that the above was intended as much for the guidance of the Empress as for that of her daughter. Mercy had no alternative but to invoke the powerful aid of the one person whose influence over his charge was inalienable, but there is abundant evidence that both he and Vermond would have gladly hailed a different tone in the voice that never spoke without effect.

Comte de Mercy continued:—

I tell her that the way to relieve Your Majesty's anxiety is for her to be perfectly happy herself—and now, of all the letters that Your Majesty has written to the Dauphine; this . . . will assuredly be one of those that will produce the greatest impression, because Your Majesty assumes a tone of the most touching tenderness to which the Dauphine is extremely sensitive. . . . The great point gained is that her heart, her mind, her character are, and always will be preserved in a (state of) purity beyond all danger. . . .

Did the tone of her child's reply convey to the Empress any suspicion that she had gone too far? She took her stand on a very grandiose plane:—

. . . Do not say that I scold, that I preach; say, "Mama loves me, and is continually occupied with my welfare. I

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must believe her and comfort her by following her good advice." I shall say no more on this subject: I said all there was to be said last time. I never keep rancour nor *versmach*:[1] when I have said a thing, it is sufficient. I am sincere, and exact great accuracy and sincerity and candour in return: being very easy and unexacting I *can* ask this.

The last sentence shews how little the best of us know ourselves as we really are. To Mercy she was unconsciously much nearer the truth, perhaps because she felt no restraining force prevented her describing her feelings in her own words:—

You will see by my daughter's letter, which has no style, that no affectionate confidences are ever shown (to) me. I do not know whether the Abbé helps her with her letters to the Emperor; these are very good, bright, and very clever. This remark is only for you: you will take no notice, except to inform me of the reason of the great difference.

The answer proves that Mercy understood the Dauphine better than her mother did:—

I laid great stress on Y.M.'s extremely tender feelings for her. H.R.H. was effusive on the subject.

"There is nothing I would not do," she said, "to prove my love for my mother."

I insisted on the great satisfaction Y.M. would find in every evidence of the attachment of her dear daughter, an object of which I imagined she would never lose sight.

Then she said to me of her own accord: "I love the Empress, but I fear her even from a distance: even in writing I am never at my ease with her."

I replied that this timidity seemed to me misplaced, and filled with inconveniences; that I had seen no signs of it when, before me, the Emperor used to address little reproofs to H.R.H.

"Oh, that is very different," she replied, "the Emperor is my brother: I answered him when he vexed me, and I was accustomed to joking with him."

There is the explanation of the difference in the style of

[1] "Versmach" means resentment. Ritter von Arneth says it is a disused provincialism.

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the Dauphine when she writes to Y.M. or to the Emperor. Besides which, never has the Abbé de Vermond dictated a consecutive sentence in H.R.H.'s letters; she sometimes gives him her idea, and when it is incorrectly worded he tells her of it.[1]

Even now the Empress declined to be mollified, or to descend ever so little from her altitude. She was wont to pour forth into the patient ear of "Mercy" many a jeremiad on the decadence of the rising generation—strongly recalling to one, in substance and form, the admonitions addressed once upon a time to oneself:—

Youth, nowadays, supports no restraints. In the present century young people like only jokes and flattery: immediately that, with the best intentions, one makes a few serious remonstrances, behold! these young people's feelings are outraged. They consider themselves scolded, and, as they always imagine, quite unjustly. I see this is also the case with my daughter. I shall, nevertheless, continue to advise her as long as you think it is of any use: and I will even write by this messenger on the lines you indicated, inserting some flattery, little, however, as I like that style. But, I repeat, so long as my daughter adheres to the levity and pliability I see in her instead of attending to our advice, I cannot count on her success. I send you her last letter, which will afford a fresh proof of her want of frankness in her explanations with me.

To this the Empress added in autograph:—

On that point I own to you I am uneasy: I find her too often in fault: and she knows how to extricate herself too cleverly, and to give a different explanation even at the expense of truth, and continues, in spite of her promise—her avowal of having failed to keep it—to do as she wishes herself.

Long after the writer had found that rest for which she often craved in the stately pomp of the vaults of her ancestors, and the daughter of whose follies she was so harsh a judge was lying in her

[1] January 16, 1773.

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nameless grave on French soil, the favourite member of that large family, the Queen of Naples, recalled their fear of their mother. Relating some anecdotes of her own childhood for the benefit of some faithful friends who shared her journey as a fugitive across Poland on her way to Vienna, the Queen ended with a panegyric on "my mother, the august Maria Theresa, who was profoundly respected by her children, who *were also terrified of her*."

The Empress declined to withdraw any of her unwise and—it must be confessed—unfair opposition to the riding, and a few months before Marie-Antoinette became Queen of France her wilfulness constituted the theme of another diatribe:—

> I see by the repugnance of my daughter to quit her riding for good and all, how she takes her own way, and endeavours to elude remonstrances that do not accord with her tastes. . . . Under the circumstances, I could not oppose this exercise, which is innocent and can do no harm.[1]

What a pity this was not taken into consideration before the poor child was accused of innumerable enormities! It was undoubtedly a very curious taste for a good and fearless rider of sixteen to prefer such a mode of enjoying the beautiful scenery of the Royal forests to lumbering along in a ponderous coach which six horses could only move with difficulty, filled as it was with the three aunts and several elderly ladies-in-waiting. Although Vermond reported to the Ambassador some impatient speeches, and certain comments at which it must have been difficult not to smile, on the perpetual injunctions received from Vienna, the Dauphine never once questioned her mother's right to command, still less her own obligation to obey.

The fact is that, reading between the lines, one sees how mortified the Empress was at the want

[1] Empress Maria Theresa to Comte de Mercy-Argenteau, December 1, 1773.

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of spontaneity of which she complained from the first. How little she understood the nature with which she had to deal, or comprehended that an appeal to the Dauphine's feelings and affections would have brought about without further parley what no amount of upbraiding, no bitter words and no injustice could ever achieve!

We may wonder at her mode of expressing what she doubtless intended as mild disapproval of a young girl's indulgence of a legitimate and harmless taste—probably inherited from herself, for she had been a great rider in her day. What more could a parent have said, how could she have worded her strictures more strongly, had the girl caught "the bad tone of her surroundings" and taken to playing with fire—to trying the power of attractions of whose potency she was so unconscious?

Comte de Mercy's microscopic system reveals no such dormant tendency, for which, had they only known it, they could not have been too thankful. The wonder is, that, high-spirited, quick-tempered and enormously admired as she was, the Dauphine did not rebel and give them all a good fright. To one at least, the bare possibility of such a proceeding would never have occurred:—

> I send you my daughter's answer to my letter, which assuredly did not produce on her the great impression with which you flattered yourself. You will be convinced when considering the tenor of this letter, which is even more dry than that of the preceding ones. How then can I count on the assertions she makes to you of her affection for me, without seeing these borne out by facts? Should I not rather fear that she seeks for subterfuges in the hope of keeping to a plan which she has fixed on beforehand?

It was fortunate that Marie-Antoinette never saw this, and that it was written to one who was worthy of all the confidence reposed in him.

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Anything more unjust it would be hard to imagine.

It is not difficult to see how the Empress chafed under the dryness and sterility of the correspondence addressed to herself, while no one was quicker to recognise the ability displayed in the letters to the Emperor. She had not the least idea of the reason for the difference, and owing to the gaps in the sequence we are not in a position to judge of the causes which specially contributed to produce the change from those first two funny little scribbles, with all their bad writing and defective spelling, both spontaneous and characteristic :—

I shall try to continue to be useful to her by my advice, without betraying ill-humour in my reply, which goes by this messenger, and of which I send you a copy, but at the same time the most indifferent I have ever written. You will not betray this: I am curious to see whether she will notice it, or whether she is too childish or thoughtless to see it.

Mercy replied briefly :—

H.R.H. very soon noticed the difference of style in Y.M.'s letter, but she did not interpret this as coldness, and I thought it better to leave it so, with the intention of returning later to the charge.

Four weeks elapsed :—

The Dauphine indeed perceived the alteration in Your Majesty's last letter, but seemed uncertain to what to attribute the change. . . . She said it contained no reprimand, but that she could not quite conclude that Your Majesty was satisfied or tranquil. . . . I replied that a little examination of conscience would enable the Dauphine to answer this for herself. "You will not deny," she said, "that I have reformed myself in many ways"; to which I agreed; but I added that certain particulars were susceptible of improvement, and that in the long run it would be dangerous if Your Majesty had reason to suppose your advice was received with inattention: in which case your extreme tenderness would be affected and discouraged, which would be a great misfortune and a source of reproach to the

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Archduchess. She remained for a few moments deep in thought, then she observed, "That will never happen: the Empress knows how I love and respect her: the Emperor is more likely to get impatient." With which the Archduchess shewed me His Majesty's last letter. This was very short and dry. H.M. said he had been gratified to hear how much the Dauphine had amused herself during the Carnival: that pleasure was very useful to promote health, but less so as regards moral qualities, because too great dissipation leads to neglect of more essential occupations. The Emperor added that he was glad to see how his letters amuse the Dauphine, and that she evidently regards them as curiosities to be put in a cabinet for show, but not for use. The Emperor finishes with: "Little sister, be candid: confess that I make you laugh, and I shall try and get accustomed to the idea." The Archduchess did not seem at first to be much struck by this letter, but I made her see that it merited all her attention, for if the Emperor really ended by believing his advice to be useless, he would lose by degrees some of the interest he takes in her, which in the long run would be a serious loss. H.R.H. became very grave: she said she knew I was right, and she would write to His Majesty in such a manner as to leave him in no doubt of the importance she attaches to his letters.

But these were the passing misunderstandings of two people who really loved each other. The Emperor's interest in the "little sister" never diminished; in 1790 the strange clairvoyance of approaching death embittered his anxiety regarding her possible fate; the last letter he dictated was addressed to her; and when he died she lost her best and truest friend.

It was particularly unfortunate that the veteran Van Loo[1] died before he had time to do more than indicate the possibilities of an equestrian portrait of a young lady whose charms consisted less in regularity or perfection of feature than in colouring, expression, and manner. The Empress, whose private rooms in all her palaces were filled with innumerable portraits of the late Emperor, her own children, living and

[1] Michel Van Loo died on March 20, 1771.

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dead, and all the members of her father's and mother's large families, was in the habit of asking with more or less insistence for some more satisfactory likeness of her youngest daughter at a date subsequent to her leaving Vienna. Finally, losing patience at repeated delays due to the apathy of the King and the jealousy of Madame Adelaide, Maria Theresa sent a definite order to her Embassy through Baron Neny, who wrote:—

I must also forewarn Y.Ex. that the Sieur Liotard,[1] known as "the Turkish painter," is to proceed from Geneva to Paris with the object (among others) of executing for Her Majesty the portrait of the Dauphine. Her Majesty desires Y.Ex. to impress on the Princess the necessity of raising no difficulties about sitting to this artist: also that she should give him time to perfect his work. She has, moreover, had a portrait enlarged from one of those remaining at this Court: but Her Majesty wishes to compare this with a good picture done at present, and she thinks that the Sieur Liotard is in a position to secure her this satisfaction. . . .[2]

The change from Vermond and his lesson-books to Liotard with his palette and brushes struck the Archduchess as a doubtful advantage. She proved a reluctant sitter; and between her delays (she generally contrived to have a previous engagement when the weather was fine), and the exactions of Liotard, who was old and cranky and very spoilt, the progress of the likeness was remarkably slow. But, cosmopolitan as the painter was, French susceptibilities had to be taken into account, and the Marquis de Marigny, Keeper of the King's Pictures and brother of Madame de Pompadour, "picqué au vif" at this unseemly selection of a

[1] Jean Etienne Liotard, born at Geneva, 1702, miniature painter, and probably the finest pastellist known. He lived for some years in Turkey, and on his return retained the style of dress he had adopted there. Hence his sobriquet. Among his *chefs-d'œuvre* two at least hang in the Royal Gallery at Dresden—his "Belle Chocolatière" and his splendid portrait of Maurice de Saxe.

[2] August 31, 1770.

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foreigner, was doing his best to hurry on Van Loo, quite past work, and also to urge the execution of a bust by Lemoyne. The old sculptor's intimate friend, François Tronchin, writing subsequently to his wife, said that Lemoyne had "transformed marble into flesh"; while the King, whose word was law, whatever his qualifications as an art-critic might be, pronounced it to be a *chef-d'œuvre* when it was exhibited the following year at the Salon. It is now believed to be in the Imperial Museum at Vienna. After endless delays and interminable discussions a fresh and very uncourtier-like hitch arose on the completion of the picture, owing to Liotard declining to deliver it until he had been paid for his labours. Perhaps he had heard that long after the miniature of Louis-Auguste by Hall had been finished and enclosed in a gold box, the Swedish Vandyck was still sending in an "account rendered." It must be remembered that the parlous plight of the Royal tradesmen and servants was a matter of common knowledge. "They are in a condition of distress and misery common to all those connected with this Court," said the Imperial ambassador. Liotard proved equally impervious to entreaty or command. Goaded by peremptory orders from the Embassy in Paris, Vermond hung about trying to obtain an interview with the Dauphine, who was inaccessible, or to catch sight of her treasurer, Randon de Pomery, who was absent in the country enjoying a brief respite from enormous bills and empty coffers, and we may imagine the luckless Abbé murmuring the old saw, "Point d'argent, point de suisse." He was finally obliged to make out the order in his own name, doubtful, too, whether it would be accepted by "cet original," as he termed Liotard.

Alas, when all these difficulties were overcome and the long-desired work of art reached its

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destination it found scant favour in the eyes of its recipient, who wrote anxiously: "I remember her prettier; does she hold herself so straight? and is she *coiffée* so?"

Monsieur de Mercy's reply was as emphatic as he could make it. The Dauphine did not hold herself so; she was inconceivably prettier—more grown and improved than Her Majesty could imagine: in short, the picture was so bad he had been doubtful about sending it at all. A French critic considers that Comte de Mercy answered as a courtier—a contention that does not seem quite tenable, for there always appears to be some slight inclination in France to minimize the beauty of Maria Theresa and her children. Good judges among the English travellers who saw them frequently wax enthusiastic on the subject of personal appearance of the entire family, pronouncing the Archduchess Marie-Christine 'handsomer than Lady Coventry — the elder of the beautiful Gunnings — and commenting on the striking resemblance of Marie-Antoinette to her sister Elisabeth, whose looks were unquestioned. Only the other day a French author stated that Maria Theresa herself was "more fascinating than handsome," a presumption that in no way tallies with contemporary foreign opinion, or, indeed, with that of her first Mistress of the Robes, who told Lady Mary Coke that "beautiful as some of the Empress's children were, they none of them equalled their mother when she first married and went to Florence."

Granted that Comte de Mercy expressed in rather flowery terms to her mother his view of his charge's appearance, there remains indisputable evidence of his taste, and his knowledge of a likeness, in a picture for the execution of which he was responsible.

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The excellent critic from whose study some of these notes are taken[1] thought that Liotard was sacrificed to a certain degree to the language of Courts. But after seeing a print of the work of art in question, it is impossible to agree that "Liotard committed no other fault than too faithfully copying his model." Any sitter could presumably be posed sitting bolt upright, staring full face out of the canvas: then asked to encase her slight figure (if she happened to be a young girl) into a narrow dress-body with tight sleeves and tighter trimmings; to drag her abundant fair hair back as if in a vice from an over-high forehead, and perch a stiff little bunch of rose-buds on the top of her head. But would any one admire the result? If so, there can be very little in grouping, pose, background, or even such essentials as the management of light and shade. This picture, whosesoever it may be, suggests every conceivable disadvantage of this description; indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a more portentous series of blunders. The early sixteenth-century painters seem to have possessed a lost art of imparting a strange cold loveliness and fascination to their old wooden portraits.

Perhaps Maria Theresa was partly responsible for the frightful dress and coiffure; she may have hampered the execution of the picture by her directions to have it done in "full dress, not in man's clothes (*i.e.* for riding) or in *négligé*." But it is hard to believe that so autocratic an individual as Liotard, who could not be induced to hurry to please an Empress, was not allowed to express an opinion in the all-important matter of arrangement.

[1] Monsieur Jules Flammermont, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1897. The latest idea is that the picture referred to by him as the work of Liotard, and supposed to be the one in question, is something quite different, and probably a copy of a portrait by another artist altogether (*Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette*, Albert Vuaflart et Henri Bourin, Part II.: Paris, 1910).

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It may be that Maria Theresa herself realised this, for she reconsidered her determination as to the dress, and wrote :—

Could you send me her portrait on horseback, in a hat, and quite small, if this is possible (and) even if the likeness is not there?

Six weeks later[1] Comte de Mercy replied :—

I believe I have at last found a painter who will succeed in painting a portrait of the Dauphine, very like, in her riding dress; the work will be executed under my eyes; but several weeks must elapse before it can be finished and brought to the necessary degree of perfection.

To which the Empress responded :—

I am anxiously waiting the approaching portrait of my daughter; the one by Liotard not being precisely successful.

It is noteworthy what pains Comte de Mercy took to gratify any wish expressed by his Sovereign, and it is due to him that success was at last attained. The artist he discovered proved worthy of the confidence reposed in his powers, although curiously enough his name is never mentioned by the ambassador himself, and the eminently satisfactory work that resulted went unsigned to Vienna. Until now no clue could be obtained to the identity of the painter whose pastel was sent from the Imperial collection at Laxenbourg on the occasion of an exhibition in France in 1894 devoted to "Marie-Antoinette and her times." Innumerable conjectures[2] and ingenious suggestions were hazarded on the subject of a picture to which the joint authors of *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette* have accorded an unstinted measure of praise. Thanks to the taste and enlightened

[1] May, 1771.

[2] The late Monsieur Flammermont was informed by Monsieur Maurice Tourneaux of a tradition in the Peyronneau family that that artist, whose pastels have been mistaken for those of La Tour, once did a picture of Marie-Antoinette.

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knowledge of Comte de Pimodan, to whom belongs the further distinction of having saved from destruction so many of the priceless papers of Comte de Mercy, it has been established that the credit for this successful work of art belongs to an Austrian, Joseph Krantzinger by name. He was not allowed much time, as the ambassador desired to send his protégé's work by the first messenger; and fearing it might not stand the jolting of the bad roads, he hurried those whom he alluded to as "les gens de métier" to unearth an expert to whom was attributed "the art of fixing pastel."[1] He was all the more careful in that he was able to state that "this portrait is of a striking resemblance"; in spite of which decided opinion, the usually accurate critic and historian often quoted has no higher praise for it than that the artist was "a clever courtier," and the subject "flattered and embellished beyond all description."

No such impression was even hinted at in her old home, and Baron Neny wrote from Schönbrunn on August 1, 1771:—

Her Majesty has received everything with satisfaction, and not the least part was evinced when the messenger presented the charming portrait of the Dauphine in a riding-habit, which arrived in perfect condition; Her Majesty is now having this copied in oils, and as she is entirely satisfied with the work of the Sieur Krantzinger, she willingly consents to Your Excellency having a gratification bestowed on him over and above the price to be paid for the picture. I remember seeing this artist in my house in Vienna; unless I am mistaken he is a native of Augsbourg or Salzbourg; he must, indeed, have improved in Paris, for his brush was (then) sufficiently mediocre.

Was it to the teaching of La Tour that Krantzinger owed his well-deserved success? It is

[1] This was A. J. Loriot, inventor of a system for treating pastels. The secret was apparently unknown here, for many eighteenth-century pictures in old English country houses bear traces of injudicious transport.

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THE DAUPHINE.

From a pastel by Joseph Krantzinger, 1771. *Imperial Collection.*

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impossible to say; and unless the engravings convey an entirely erroneous impression, the composition and drawing of the picture are quite equal to the colouring. The youthful sitter has been permitted to place herself on a comfortable seat, and to subside into a natural easy position not unsuggestive of the tendency to "loll," of which the ambassador disapproved. Behind her is the appropriate background of trees and sky, for she is dressed in the quaint adaptation of the uniform of the Royal hunt, a dress which, as Mercy declared, "suited her to perfection," and in which she excited the admiration of the Corps Diplomatique who arrived inopportunely to pay their respects at Fontainebleau as she was on the point of starting for a ride. The artist has, this time, made the most of every advantage. A picturesque hat softened by white feathers conceals the over-high forehead, and gives the necessary shade to an excessively fair skin. The face is half turned away, and the foreshortening lessens its undue length and obviates any suggestion of a possible increase in the size of the nose as time goes on. The Hapsbourg under lip is slightly toned down; the eyes, quite clearly *à fleur de tête*, may be rather beautified as regards their size and the marking of the too regular eyebrows, and by the darkening of the lashes. The boyish figure and narrow shoulders gain importance from the masterly treatment of the red skirt and the man's coat frogged with gold, opening over a blue and white striped silk waistcoat. Under Mechlin lace ruffles, the pretty little hands, on whose beauty every one expatiated, are carefully displayed, one hanging over the table, the other holding a gold-headed whip.[1]

[1] My own impressions of this picture, the value of which as a likeness is attested by the Empress and her family, as by Mercy, under

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It is not improbable that Liotard saw this successful picture hanging near his own when he paid another visit to Vienna in 1777. Here, where he had been treated with great distinction when he painted the portraits of the Empress, the late Emperor, and others, he now found himself welcomed as graciously as before by Maria Theresa in spite of his troublesome behaviour over the Dauphine's picture. But by the rest of society he was completely set aside in favour of the Swedish painter Roslin,[1] and wrote bitterly to his fellow countryman, François Tronchin: "I am not asked to paint any Archduchesses; they fear I shall not make them pretty enough."

To this day Marie-Antoinette, as we imagine her as a girl of fifteen, looks down from the walls of the Belvedere Palace.[2] She is not smiling and joyous, as befits her age and the consciousness of having made the first marriage in Europe. Her expression is grave, inquiring, rather pensive. Any one who has seen an early portrait of François de Lorraine can hardly fail to be struck by its resemblance to his youngest daughter. The likeness is perhaps heightened by the similarity

whose supervision it was executed, were derived from a rather mediocre print which I did not propose to include in this volume. I am all the more indebted to the editors and publisher of *Les Portraits de Marie-Antoinette* for their kindness in permitting the reproduction of their beautiful engraving of this interesting portrait.

[1] Alexandre Roslin was born at Malmö, Sweden, in 1720. Elected to the Academy in Paris in 1752, he established himself in the Louvre, whence he made long journeys to various foreign Courts. He was said to have painted every crowned head in Europe and only one bourgeois, viz. Linné. The Empress declined to sit to him on account of the amount of time he demanded, and Marie-Antoinette replied that she did not know that "Rosceline" was "so indiscreet" about his sittings. His wife, Marie Suzanne Giroust, a first-rate portrait painter, was also elected a member of the Academy.

[2] Formerly the property of Eugene of Savoy, Prinz Eugen, "der edle Ritter." After his death it was acquired from his niece, and principally used for occasional dinners and fêtes. The Empress once lent it to Prince Kaunitz. It is now the residence of one of the Archdukes.

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in their clothes—both are wearing three-cornered hats and laced coats; she might easily be taken for the younger brother of the handsome boy of nineteen. There is in both pictures the same long oval face, the same slightly projecting blue eyes, the same high-bred features with the identical half-smile and the underlying melancholy. Did this remarkable resemblance strike some hidden chord in the Empress's mind and bring back a flood of memories, indescribably sweet and poignantly bitter, inseparably bound up with the one great love of her life? It is possible that the shadow on the fair young face suggested to the mother a faint indefinable suggestion of dread—a premonition of that awful future—as she wrote: "I have received your portrait in pastel, very like; it is a joy to me and to all the family: it is in my cabinet where I work and . . . (another small picture of the same) in my bedroom where I work at night. Thus, I have you always with me, under my eyes—as in my heart you are ever and deeply enshrined."

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CHAPTER XVII

THE END

THOSE who are best acquainted with modern Paris would perhaps find it more difficult than others, whose knowledge of that beautiful capital is merely superficial, to imagine it as it was when the last Dauphin and Dauphine of the old *régime* made their state entry after their marriage. It would at least be imposing a heavy strain on the credulity of those who have seen it as it exists to-day to ask them to believe that a cultivated and impartial foreigner had ever pronounced it to be inferior in appearance to London, although he fully admitted the superior beauty of its environs, foremost among which he placed Montmartre.

In 1773 the Seine was almost stagnant water—thick, muddy, and discoloured like the huge rivers that traverse native cities in the Far East. Closely contiguous to the finest hôtels were narrow houses, six or seven stories high, consisting of collections of small rooms with red-tiled floors, suggestive of rabbit-warrens in their general construction, each set communicating through one small door with a common staircase fully as filthy as the streets themselves. The latter were paved with cobbles, and were so narrow that the gorgeous equipages of the great, the humbler hired coaches, *carrosses de remise* (compulsorily distinguished by an iron ring en-

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circling the entire wheel), down to the fiacres or hackney-carriages (driven, as in the days of Henri Quatre, by a man standing on a wooden board at the back), one and all bespattered the unwary pedestrians with mud as they clattered by. Foot-passengers, moreover, ran a still greater danger, for no "side-walks" or pavements existed, and to flatten a well-dressed passer-by against the wall and add to his fears for his limbs or his life, seemed to be the principal aim and object of all drivers, small and great. The unfortunate horses painfully dragging the humbler class of vehicle were mere skin and bone, and the treatment these poor animals experienced, when hardly able to crawl between the shafts of a heavy vehicle with four inside and a couple of lacqueys hanging on behind, cannot be described. The sedan-chairs that plied for hire were unlike those then in vogue in London; the body resembled the chairs at Bath or Tunbridge Wells, used by invalids, but those in Paris had one little pane of glass in front, and two wheels and a couple of shafts, by which one man dragged the vehicle along, after the fashion of a wheel-barrow. Persons of quality avoided such means of progression, and a few private individuals used richly-painted sedan-chairs carried by porters, as in England.

The police of Paris excited the admiration of travellers, who asserted that the streets were so safe as to permit pedestrians to walk about late at night without risk of being suddenly attacked with rapier or poniard. Foreigners were objects of intense interest to the spies of Monsieur de Sartines, ranging as these did from the shoeblack of the Pont-Neuf to an imposing wearer of the Croix de St. Louis. But what perhaps principally struck new arrivals was the potency and variety of the odours that assailed their olfactory organs even in fine thorough-

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fares,[1] and culminated in the narrow streets of the poorer and more ancient quarters, where the high buildings excluded every ray of the sun. Night must have descended early on these narrow passages—they were little more—and they were lighted by means of lanterns hung on lines suspended between the houses, the end secured in a little box in the wall, the key kept by the individual whose duty it was to trim the wick and polish its tin reflector. Yet even this method of lighting was superior to that of London at the same date!

Those denizens of our metropolis who recollect the slums which, until comparatively recent years, surrounded such places of residence as Grosvenor and Berkeley Squares, can imagine the network of rookeries, strange old courts, and blind alleys that encompassed the great palaces of the Louvre, the Tuileries, and other celebrated buildings, like Notre Dame. About this time the beautiful gardens of the Tuileries were used chiefly by the more respectable members of the middle classes, who refused to bow to the capricious mandates of a fashion that relegated the beaux and large numbers of the *jeunesse dorée* to the small, shut-in, formal garden of the Palais Royal, where the most notorious bad characters of Paris also congregated. A terrace walk bordered the river, and was continued half round the Tuileries gardens, terminating near the statue of Louis XV., from which a grand *allée* four or five hundred feet long, shaded by fine trees, led towards the centre of a palace that was rarely visited and never lived in by its absent owner. Cardinal de Richelieu's

[1] Judging by the accounts of Voltaire and of a young girl who afterwards became known to fame as Madame Roland, Versailles itself was no better in this respect. She relates that the corridors leading to the rooms which her mother had been lent, "situated under the roof," were almost impassable. Further along were the "lodgings" of the Archbishop of Paris, Christophe de Beaumont.

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huge residence was inhabited by the Duc d'Orléans, the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres, and was in fact the headquarters of the faction that opposed the Court party. Its magnificent picture-gallery was generally considered to be the finest private collection in Europe, and included several masterpieces bought in London by the French Ambassador when Oliver Cromwell dispersed the indisputable evidences of the taste of our most artistic and art-loving King. His own portrait by Vandyck, with that of Henrietta Maria—thus returned to her native land—a portrait of the Earl of Arundel, and those of two children with dogs were among those that came from England; and others included a Madonna and Child by Rubens, and a Dutch Burgomaster, said then to be "the finest Rembrandt in existence."

Waves of anarchy swept some of these pictures back again across the channel. The Italian pictures from the Orléans gallery were sold for £40,000 to Mr. Michael Bryan, acting for the Duke of Bridgewater, and buying also for the King. After the Revolution, an immense quantity of pictures, furniture, and *objets d'art* were brought to this country, the purchasers profiting by the general upheaval in France, and in some cases by the penurious condition of the owners. The members of the Government of that day had little idea what they would be held responsible for in the future, and would probably have cared even less had they known.

It was mainly due to the King's apathy and the jealousy of Madame Adelaide that the state entry of Louis-Auguste and Marie-Antoinette into the capital took place so long after their marriage as June, 1773. Before a year had elapsed they were destined to be at liberty to make their own plans, and it speaks eloquently for Comte de Mercy's powers

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of observation that certain symptoms he detected in the King resulted in the ambassador making urgent representations as to the necessity of postponing the ceremony no longer. The Archduchess screwed up her courage to the necessary point, and the King replying, "with the best grace in the world," "Je ne demande pas mieux," nothing remained except to fix the day, which the monarch told his grandchildren they were at liberty to do as it suited themselves. Their selection of the 8th of June proved a very fortunate one, and the result had better be described in the Dauphine's own words:—

Madame my very dear mother . . . I had a fête last Tuesday that I shall remember all my life: we made our entry into Paris. We received all imaginable honours, which, although very well, were not what touched me most, which was the affection and anxiety of that poor people who, although weighed down by taxes, was transported with joy at seeing us. When we went to walk at the Tuileries, there was so great a crowd that we were for three-quarters of an hour unable to go forwards or back. The Dauphin and I repeatedly ordered the guards to strike no one, which produced a very good effect. Such excellent order was kept that in spite of the enormous crowds that followed us everywhere, no one was wounded. On returning we got up on the terrace and remained there for half an hour. I cannot describe to you, my dear mamma, the transports of joy and of affection that were shown us. Before retiring we saluted the populace by waving our hands, which gave great pleasure. How happy we are to be able to gain the affection of a whole nation with so little trouble! There is, however, nothing so precious: I felt it, and shall feel it always. Another point that gave great pleasure on that happy day was the behaviour of the Dauphin: who responded admirably to all the harangues, observed all that was being done for him, and especially the joy and assiduities of the people, to whom he showed much good feeling. . . . We are going to-morrow to the Opera[1] in Paris: there is a (general)

[1] The new Opera House was opened on 26th January, 1770. The land was the property of the Duc d'Orléans, who had chosen Moreau, "Maître-Général des Bâtiments de la Ville," to design the building in harmony with the style of the adjacent Palais-Royal.

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wish that we should do so, and I believe we shall even go on two other days to the French and Italian theatres. . . . I feel every day more and more all that my dear mamma has done in the matter of settling me. I was the last of all and she has treated me as the eldest. . . .

Her adviser-in-chief chimed in :—

My official despatches contained the account of the entry of the Dauphin and Dauphine to Paris. Nothing was left to be desired as to the success that H.R.H. experienced on that occasion: the public was seized by a sort of enthusiasm for the Archduchess, and in the remarks were mingled veneration and respect for Your Majesty. The people said "that by her graces and goodness they recognized the daughter of the august Maria Theresa." Everywhere the Dauphine went she looked laughingly at the populace: she saluted persons of distinction when, after her dinner, she walked in the gardens of the Tuileries, where without exaggeration there were more than fifty thousand souls, and where the spectators had even climbed the trees. H.R.H. ordered the guards not to repulse the people, and to allow them to approach as they wished. Hence it happened that the suite were several times cut off by the crowd: one only heard clapping of hands and repeated exclamations of: "How pretty! how charming she is!" At the moment of departure H.R.H. mounted the grand balcony on the façade of the château and greeted the public on the right and left. . . . The Dauphin, who comported himself perfectly well, was only regarded as an accessory to the ceremony. Every one talked of the Dauphine alone, and the Rector of the University of Paris, when publishing the announcement which I subjoin here, only makes an incidental reference to the Dauphin. . . . This ceremony was of great consequence in fixing public opinion, and it would be impossible to display more grace, charm, and presence of mind than was demonstrated by the Dauphine in this connection.

We know the procedure. The reception of the young pair at the Porte de la Conférence by the Governor of Paris, the old Duc de Brissac, with the Corporation and Monsieur de Sartines, chief of the police, reinforced by various heads of departments, all well represented by those who,

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except in the case of the older members, had had no opportunity of witnessing any such ceremonial. Here the Royalties and their suites exchanged the carriages in which they had driven ten miles from Versailles for six *carrosses de gala*. On this occasion they probably used one of the most splendid of the equipages usually reserved for the King. That in which the Dauphine habitually drove to functions was a glass coach, with a carved and gilt body, lined with red velvet and gold, intended for eight occupants at least. It was drawn by as many white horses, with their magnificent gold and silver plated harness further adorned by white feathers on the animals' heads and manes. Considering the weight of the vehicle and the trappings, the marvel is that it could be moved at all, taking into consideration the state of the roads, and the number of attendants in gold coats and three-cornered hats who hung on behind.[1]

Forty years later the Comte de Provence, grown old and unwieldy, returned to his kingdom as Louis XVIII., calling attention with exaggerated theatrical gestures to the Duchesse d'Angoulême seated by his side. Traces of the captive Eagle still lingered then over the great city, and the buildings on which the stern melancholy gaze of Marie-Thérèse-Charlotte was fixed, was not the Paris where her mother had smiled at seventeen on the gaping crowds. The names of the thoroughfares through which the Dauphin and Marie-Antoinette passed would convey little information to us now—so many of the buildings themselves have been swept away—through which the long

[1] Certain customs in France before the Revolution strongly recall those obtaining in India to-day. Many times my pleasure in the splendid pageants there has been spoilt by seeing a *pair* of unfortunate horses labouring along the sandy roads in the kind of vehicle called in old novels a "barouche," which would have tried the powers of an ordinary team. I cannot recollect seeing a single gala carriage of this special description properly horsed.

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procession wended its way through packed streets to Notre Dame, where the Archbishop and Chapter met the visitors on the steps of the cathedral. After attending low mass, the young couple visited the Treasury, and returned *via* St. Geneviève to the Tuileries, part of a lengthy programme that kept them moving through the greater part of the long summer day. On the terrace of the palace a slight graceful figure was the cynosure of all eyes, while the old Duc de Brissac delivered himself of compliments in rather doubtful taste, and she, smiling and colouring, kept on repeating: "What crowds of people!" "How good! how kind they are!"[1]

Her old playfellow from Vienna, Joseph Weber, was not the only foreigner who waited about in the streets to catch a glimpse of her on that June day. The English naval officer whose recollections have been already quoted said:—

> The Dauphin and the beautiful Dauphiness made their public *entrée*. On entering the city guns from the Bastille saluted them. . . . An amazing crowd gathered all the way . . . an old woman having fortunately got a convenient stand, close to which they passed, called out in rapture, "God bless your sweet face!" adding blessings on an imaginary heir to the throne, to whom the old lady could wish no better fate than to attain the grade of a Marshal of France, the highest distinction of which she knew. The Dauphine heard her, half smiled, and blushed deeply. Frenchmen were divided in opinion why she blushed; the generality rather thought her royal consort ought to have blushed. Such a crowd I never experienced in my life. It was almost impossible for a company of the Guards who surrounded them to keep off the mob, though by that epithet I do not mean the rabble. I do not remember to have observed such extraordinary patience as the military exhibited on this occasion, to their great honour. They were squeezed, trampled on, and hardly permitted to advance. Their officers suffered in like manner, but all the force they exerted was entreaties and persuasions. It became at last

[1] *Memoirs of Joseph Weber*, p. 21.

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impossible to proceed, and the royal pair returned to the palace half-stifled with dust and want of air. The Dauphine, however, smiled often, and seemed pleased with the vast concourse of people, and with the flattering epithets. . . . In the evening[1] they went to the play, which was a comedy, with that pathetic little piece after, *Le Déserteur*.[2] I was surprised, considering the avidity they were gazed upon and followed, that I was able to procure a box near them without any great difficulty. A favourite actor,[3] who had retired from the stage, played again for this night. The house was illuminated *en gala*, and the royal pair sat together in a box on the first story. . . . Part of a song had the words in it, *Vive le Roi!* which the audience encored seven or eight times. I was amazed at this, knowing their dislike of old Louis, who grinds them down with infamous heavy taxes to support an insatiable favourite. . . .

The writer of this excellent description perhaps did not notice that after "Vive le Roi!" Clairval added "et ses chers enfants!" which was cheered to the echo, the Dauphine having with great presence of mind led off the clapping for the King.

Marie-Antoinette wrote an account to the Empress, to whom she confided that she herself had been "moved to tears":—

I can only compare that great day to the one when my dear mamma went to a performance after the birth of my nephew of Florence. Although I was only a child, I felt how all hearts were moved by the presence of my dear mamma.

This refers to an historic scene, when the news of the birth of her first grandson moved the Empress to enter a theatre for the first time since the death of the late Emperor, for whom she wore mourning to the end of her life. Her faithful subjects were wont to comment with undisguised pleasure on any improvement in her spirits, and were never tired of describing to foreigners who

[1] A few evenings later at the Comédie Italienne.
[2] *Le Déserteur*, of Sedaine and Monsigny.
[3] This was Clairval, who played the part of "Monte au Ciel."

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visited Vienna the extraordinary effect produced by her appearance at a public entertainment. Lady Mary Coke wrote:—

> A lady who was present told me she never saw so touching a scene: the joy of seeing the Empress, the gratitude for her condescending goodness, had such an effect on every mortal, 'twas thought the acclamations would never have ceased: when the Empress could be heard she came forward and said she returned them thanks for the interest they took in her satisfaction. . . .

Maria Theresa had advanced to the front of the Royal box, and said quite clearly to the audience all standing: "Der Leopold hat ein Buben."[1] Little as any one guessed it then, the baby whose birth they hailed was fated to reign as the last head of the Holy Roman Empire, and to possess powers that might perhaps have saved two helpless captives —she, now Queen of France, who recalled the scene, and her best beloved child.

It was not surprising that success which surpassed the hopes of anxious well-wishers like the Imperial ambassador should inspire Marie-Antoinette with a keen desire to revisit the scene of her triumphs as often as possible. She regretted the impending move to Compiègne because it "is farther from dear Paris." This was replete with attractions, and a weekly visit was considered obligatory. The Salon, the Galerie des Plans, at that time located in the Louvre, and the garden of the Maréchal Duc de Biron were all inspected in turn. It was perhaps to be expected that in dwelling on all her successes Comte de Mercy should enlarge on the comparative coldness of the reception accorded to Comte and Comtesse de Provence, in spite of their having contrived to obtain the King's leave to command an elaborate ceremonial in the matter of Royal salutes and

[1] Literally: "Leopold has a boy."

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guards of honour inside the theatres as well as out, "which," added Comte de Mercy, much displeased at a straining of privileges threatening to encroach on the prerogatives of his Archduchess, "are only practised here for the Sovereign—or at most for the heir-presumptive to the crown."

All these and many more "miserable manœuvres" he attributed to "a jealousy of the Dauphine which breaks out on all occasions." Needless to say, this was shared by Madame Adelaide, with whom, in fact, much of it originated. But, as all their efforts to eclipse the rising sun only took the comparatively inglorious form of "promenades" and visits to "boutiques" (possibly the same shops that when honoured by the Dauphine's presence he called "magasins marchands"), we feel no disposition to cavil at his view that these tentatives of the old princesses "produced little or no effect on the public." Occasionally Madame de Marsan permitted her pupils to share the excursions of the Dauphin and his wife, whom they accompanied to the Duc d'Orléans's park of St. Cloud, where the public, admitted under few restrictions, rushed to stare rapturously at the young party. It is to be feared that the rotund figure of Madame Clothilde, who was pronounced by English visitors to be "the fattest person they ever saw," may have suggested comparisons with the rival attractions awaiting the young people at the fair of St. Ovide.

Marie-Antoinette's success in public served further to rouse Comte de Mercy to fresh efforts with regard to future contingencies, which he discerned with increasing anxiety during that summer of 1773:—

I see more and more the time approaching which will witness the accomplishment of the destiny of the Princess. The King ages; he constantly repeats himself. He is isolated,

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without comfort from his children, without resources, zeal, attachment, or fidelity on the part of the bizarre assemblage that composes his surroundings. He has no resources in his old age but those he finds in the Dauphine. . . . But there is one point on which I never cease to insist, and that seems to me to merit all Your Majesty's attention. The Dauphine understands business with extreme facility, and fears it to excess; she never allows herself to suppose that she may one day possess both authority and power; from which it results that her character acquires daily a dependent and passive trend: hence ensues habits of timidity and fear on the least occasion: H.R.H. fears to speak to the King; she fears the Ministers; even the persons who compose her service have an intimidating effect on her. . . . Besides all this, the Dauphin, with good sense and excellent ingredients in his character, will probably never have strength or will-power to permit him to reign by himself. If the Archduchess does not govern him he will be ruled by others.

Vermond endorsed this a year later :—

I have seen the Queen a little piqued at the fear in Vienna that she may meddle in business; she is, as ever, so removed from doing so both by principle and inclination that she does not comprehend this disquietude. The Queen herself made a significant remark to me. She feels how unhappy it would make her to see any differences between the two Courts, but "How am I to prevent it," she inquired, "if I am never to interfere in business?"

That was a problem that then and after pre-occupied wiser heads than that of the Abbé.

To Mercy's letter describing the Dauphine's timidity the Empress dictated the following letter on 31st August, 1773 :—

It is necessary to possess your zeal and diligence in order to enter into the *minutie* that overwhelms the Court of Versailles, leaving no time for essential objects. Only your attachment to my daughter could enable you to endure such wearisome labours, and my gratitude can more easily be felt than expressed. I own to you frankly that I do not desire to see my daughter gain preponderating influence in affairs. I have only too thoroughly learned by my own experience what an overwhelming burden is the government of a vast

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monarchy. Moreover, I know her youth and levity, joined to her distaste for application (also that she knows nothing [1]), which would make me all the more fearful for her success in a government so gone to pieces ("si délabrée") as is the French one at present. If my daughter could effect no improvement, or if the state of things grew worse, I should prefer that a Minister rather than my daughter should bear the blame. . . . I could therefore not bring myself to talk to her of politics unless you should think it necessary, and should then tell me clearly what I should write.

The Dauphine was gaining confidence in herself, and was now quite emancipated from the domination of her aunts. Madame de Noailles had acquired no counteracting influence, but remained on in her post, to the satisfaction of Mercy; "for," he said, "it is highly essential that the Dauphine should always have near her some one who, by her demeanour and age, is in a position to make herself considered, and to repress the *penchant* to which the French are only too much inclined to become easy and familiar." And the Empress agreed, for "Madame de Noailles is far better than some one belonging to the clique of la Barry." The young girl herself was happier, knowing that she had earned the approval of "Mercy," to whom she said: "When I first came to this country I was too young and thoughtless: I believed everything I was told, but now——." At seventeen she doubtless felt she had little to learn of life.

She had taken to driving herself about in a "little two-wheeled carriage, called here a cabriolet," a "fashion of promenading" which Comte de Mercy felt might not be "without inconveniences but for the number of persons on horseback by whom she is surrounded." The latter were not, however, free from drawbacks, at least when the Dauphine herself was mounted, for on one occasion an equerry's horse edged sufficiently

[1] This inserted in autograph. But *à qui la faute?*

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near to kick her foot, which was so swollen on her return that her dressers extracted an avowal that nothing but a desire to avoid paining the gentleman had prevented her going straight home.

The story of the thousand écus she sent to the fund for the sufferers from the fire at the Hôtel Dieu (hospital) is well known. So elaborate were her precautions to preserve her incognito that Vermond himself only discovered by accident whence the money came. Accustomed as she was to the Empress's habit of proceeding in person, and expecting her children to follow her example, to condole with any member of great families in Vienna who enjoyed their Sovereign's esteem, it must have been a shock to the Dauphine to find that the Bourbon custom was to go and see no one, but to vegetate in disregard of all such calls on their sympathy or time. "Mesdames" thought Royal visiting an extraordinary practice and could not understand it at all. When a young lady-in-waiting, highly esteemed for her gentle, amiable character, removed from all inclination to intrigue, was plunged into indescribable grief at the loss of her little boy, an only child, the Dauphine at once proposed to drive to Paris to see her and "try to give her some comfort." The old princesses were scandalised at the bare idea. They represented to their niece that it was most unusual for members of the Royal Family to visit private people at a distance from Court, that serious consequences would result from such a proceeding, etc., etc. The Dauphine, "rather shocked" in her turn, entered into no explanations, but wrote to the King without consulting any one further, and received the following reply: "Although we are not accustomed to paying visits at a distance, my dear daughter, you are at perfect liberty to act according to the

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dictates of your kind heart as regards this poor woman." Armed with this permission Marie-Antoinette went to sit with Madame de Mailly, to the surprise and pleasure of the public of Paris, "only too little accustomed to benevolent proceedings on the part of princes and princesses of the Royal Family."

We can see by his manner of dwelling on these personal traits how glad Comte de Mercy was to be able to send such reassuring reports:—

It is true that the Archduchess inclines a little to her own way, more especially when these concern objects of dissipation and amusement; but I can equally assert that for some time now she listens to serious subjects with an attention which was formerly wanting . . . and that she never disagrees with a good reason presented to her with a certain amount of energy and lucidity. . . . It is, however, only too true that the Archduchess does not always act according to her own judgment and conviction; I see that this inconsequence is due to little promptings of embarrassment or fear. Only time and experience can remedy this; the essential is that, as regards principles, character, and judgment, Madame la Dauphine is so happily gifted that it is morally impossible she should fall into serious mistakes, either in the present or the future. . . .

As he had denied the justice of attributing insincerity to his charge, he now testified to her marked improvement, and commented strongly on the great point in which she never *had* been found wanting:—

H.R.H. fulfills her religious duties in the most edifying manner, and she has never failed in any respect in this essential matter.

And to Prince Kaunitz he had already written:—

Since my last explanation with Monsieur d'Aiguillon on the subject of Madame the Dauphine, he has left me in peace about this young princess, who really behaves herself with more wisdom, prudence and success than one might

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expect from her age, her tiresome and miserable surroundings, and the sum-total of the horrible intrigues of the maelstrom ("tourbillon") she is in.

No one can accuse Maria Theresa of neglecting any means at her command to unravel the mystery of Louis-Auguste's personality, for, a few months after her daughter's departure, a physician-in-ordinary, Ingenhousz by name, was sent specially to Versailles with the evident object of inquiring into Louis-Auguste's mental capacity—an object which Madame Adelaide did her best to frustrate until she was checkmated by Comte de Mercy. Eventually the Empress's questions to the Ambassador became so insistent and of such a nature that he was constrained to call attention to the obvious truth that "it is only by the Dauphine that Your Majesty can be informed of the terms upon which she stands as regards her spouse." This resource proving inadequate, one of the two confidential secretaries who never left her was despatched to Paris in February, 1774, armed with portfolios of secret letters, a diamond aigrette for the Dauphine, and stringent instructions as to the nature and volume of the replies he was to bring, over and above the result of his own observation.

Aiguillon's uneasy vanity was roused at once; and Comte de Mercy's precautions included averting the even more pressing danger of exciting the ire of the Chancellor, Maupeou. It was settled that no interview between Baron Neny and Louis XV.'s Minister should take place under any circumstances whatever, except in the presence of the Austrian ambassador. This arrangement met with the Empress's unqualified approval, but the Baron's journey was made the pretext, as usual, for a great deal of mischief. The fact was, as the Empress and Mercy both knew, "my faithful Neny" was far too outspoken and curiously un-

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sophisticated, considering his age and training, to be trusted alone in such a "tourbillon"—such a hot-bed of intrigue and scandal as Versailles. The Dauphine was enchanted at her old friend's advent:—

I was at the moment of Neny's arrival giving an audience to the Sardinian Ambassador and the whole Corps Diplomatique: what a joy for me to be able to show such a charming token of affection![1] Another joy for me is that the Dauphin proved to Neny his respect for my mother.

It must indeed have been a relief to see frequently, and talk freely, for once, with one who was so deeply in the confidence of a beloved parent. Mercy installed Baron Neny at Versailles, thinking it prudent to absent himself on account of the watchful jealousy of the Duc d'Aiguillon. Marie-Antoinette begged to be allowed to keep Neny for some days close at hand, and their talks far exceeded what the Ambassador considered prudent, both as to the time they occupied and the range of topics under discussion. It would have been probably hard for any one to say which was the more indiscreet of the two: both were impulsive, warm-hearted people, unsuspicious of others, and only too anxious to enlarge upon any and every subject that occurred to either. It is probable that Baron Neny saw the real Marie-Antoinette as she was—ingenuous and frank—never attempting, as he said, to extenuate any mistakes she had made in the past, and only too anxious to earn the Empress's approval in the future. That is all we know. But it is evident that the accounts given by the secretary on his return of the Dauphine's position, her relations with the Royal Family, her health and well-being, relieved her mother's mind of a great burden, for those who saw

[1] The diamond aigrette.

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Maria Theresa about this time commented on her satisfaction and her excellent spirits. Among many other commissions Baron Neny had been entrusted with a splendid clock sent by Marie-Antoinette to her mother, the dial supported by three figures attired in the classic draperies associated with the Graces, probably from Falconet's celebrated design. The Empress laughed heartily when the present was unpacked, for her daughter apologised for anything lacking in the costume of the supporters of her clock: "Comme les Grâces n'a pas faites beaucoup de toilette, pour raccommoder les Choses j'envoye à Votre Majesté le portrait de ma tante, la Carmélite."[1] And to the intense amusement of the Empress, who repeated the story herself, a print of Madame Louise, devout, and it must be confessed eminently unlovely (if it is the one I know) in her nun's dress, was produced in due course from among the Baron's hoards.

Louis de Rohan filled up the measure of his iniquities by stirring up strife with the Empress, the Emperor and the Chancellor, to the last two of whom he more than hinted at a plot and a secret mission to Aiguillon involving his (the French ambassador's) recall, all concealed beneath the peaceful appearance of a private visit to France. The Empress wrote to Comte de Mercy:—

I think Pichler may inform you by this messenger how badly Rohan has been behaving, and poor innocent Neny had to bear the brunt. But you will be more astonished to hear that this same Rohan having been at St. Hubert with the Emperor the latter made him sit beside him at the table, and he chattered ("il a jasé") for two hours on end:

[1] Lady Mary Coke was allowed to make a copy of the original, the translation of which is: "As the Graces *has* not made much toilette, to mend matters I send Your Majesty the portrait of my aunt, the Carmelite."

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I do not know what about, but a very marked desire to go to Paris is the result. The duration, the visits, the mode of life — all was arranged, advice as to individuals was given, and Heaven knows what besides. . . . He (the Emperor) despises Rohan: he even speaks too openly against him, but he amuses him and tells him things that no one else would dream of saying. . . .

As an able historian[1] has observed, certain ill-informed writers have tried to invest the future Cardinal with diplomatic abilities which he was far indeed from possessing. The Empress was quite correct in stating that Prince Kaunitz approved of an envoy who amused him without incommoding him in any way, as he might have done had he been competent to embarrass the Austrian Government with regard to such burning questions as the affairs of Poland, about which he knew very little and probably cared even less. He has not gone down to posterity as the able diplomatist who crossed swords with the celebrated Prince Kaunitz and reaped advantages for his own country in defiance of the Machiavellian schemes of that renowned statesman, but is remembered only in connection with a diamond necklace which he tried to force on a young queen.

Certain of the Corps Diplomatique were less accommodating in the matter of Poland. "Stormond" as the Empress called him *tout bonnement*— Marie-Antoinette writing of him as "Monsieur de Stormond" or "My lord Stormond" — was as devoted to the Empress, personally, as every one else who was brought into close contact with her. In fact Lord Stormont[2] was so Austrian in his

[1] Monsieur de la Rocheterie.

[2] David Murray, seventh Viscount Stormont, born in 1727; succeeded his father in 1748; Attaché to the British Embassy in Paris, 1757; Envoy to the Court of Saxony, first in Dresden and then at Warsaw; British Ambassador at Vienna: transferred to Paris, 1772; Secretary of State for the Northern Department, 1779; President of the Council, 1783. He succeeded his uncle as second Earl of Mans-

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sympathies that he subsequently went by the nickname, among his colleagues in Paris, of "l'Autrichien."[1] But the partition was a bitter pill to swallow; and no one entered into and sympathised more thoroughly with his sensations than Maria Theresa herself. Notwithstanding this she had to guard against risks. She had written in the summer of 1772:—

He is an honest man, intelligent and reasonable; but our unhappy existing system has revolted him and put him against us.

It is to be presumed he knew that his correspondence went through certain vicissitudes before it reached St. James':—

Stormond is still very bitter against our arrangements in Poland: as you will see by the enclosed copy of his despatch.

Comte de Mercy thoroughly agreed:—

The personal sentiments of the Lord Stormont demand a great deal of attention on the arrival of this Ambassador at this Court: the conformity of his mode of thought on Poland with that of the Duc d'Aiguillon might establish between them more harmony than would suit the interests of Your Majesty.

The writer was accordingly commanded to adopt a course which he described as "closely watching his proceedings," or as he put it "lorsque le Lord Stormond sera arrivé ici, je veillerai de près sur ses démarches"; a laudable undertaking in which we have no reason to suppose that he allowed the grass to grow under his feet.

The "existing system" had no effect on Lord Stormont's personal feelings. After vacating his post at Vienna he spent some months in England

field in 1793, and died at Brighton in September of the following year. Lord Stormont, to call him by the name by which he is best known, was twice married.

[1] *Correspondance secrète des Ministres Étrangers à Paris*, par Jules Flammermond.

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before returning to the Embassy, from which he was so abruptly recalled in March, 1778, when King George was informed by Louis XVI. that he had signed a treaty with the insurgents in America. General Conway, remarking on a flying visit paid him at Park Place, Henley, by his friend, added that "the charms of Paris do not seem to have moved his constancy from Vienna. He talks of it with the same pleasure and regret as the day he first left it."[1]

Prince Kaunitz devoted little of his valuable time to considering the probability of the spies of Louis de Rohan, headed by the Abbé Georgel, intercepting and repeating certain unflattering opinions the Chancellor was in the habit of remitting to Comte de Mercy in Paris on the subject of the volatile French Envoy—it is impossible to recollect that he was a priest:—

> You returned an excellent answer to Monsieur d'Aiguillon's complaints of the Coadjutor: "Why do you not recall him, if you are so dissatisfied with him?" Impossible to put it better. Nevertheless please so manage that, in the event of a recall, they do not send us "un crâne" or "un impertinent," as, although I should have no difficulty in squashing him, I own to you I would rather be spared the trouble.

Comte de Mercy's reply proves how he had fathomed Aiguillon:—

> Her Majesty persists that the Coadjutor should depart before the end of the year . . . Possibly it might rejoice Monsieur d'Aiguillon should Her Majesty lose patience and cause an *éclat* . . . it might be more convenient to him to crush his enemy by means of the hand of the Empress.

That, no doubt, was the Minister's intention, although he had not sufficient ability to carry his project through. The King being at Choisy in the middle of December, 1773, the usual Tuesday

[1] The Hon. H. Seymour Conway to Sir R. Keith, June, 1775.

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reception of the Corps Diplomatique was held at Aiguillon's own house in Paris. A *chargé d'affaires* had to wait his turn until the conclusion of the receptions of Ambassadors, Ministers, and Envoys-Extraordinary. On this occasion Colonel St. Paul's unusually long wait was only enlivened by the loud voices of the Minister and the Spanish ambassador, with his Embassy secretary, which for nearly an hour could be heard (without any words being distinguished) in the Duke's private room. They gave place to Count "Merci" (as he calls him), who was closeted even longer with the First Minister, and it was after two o'clock (the limit of the official visiting hour of that date) when both appeared together in the crowded reception-room, the Dutch and one or two other Ministers merely bowing to Aiguillon as he "conducted the Imperial Ambassador to the door."

A report of the King's precarious condition of health had been circulated in England and contradicted from Paris the previous autumn by Colonel St. Paul, who was less well informed than Mercy:—"The King is not old in actual years, but very much so in fact, in consequence of the life he has led."[1] He was within two months of sixty-four years of age, and his reign lasted fifty-nine years.

The sands were running low.

Spring once more: the lilacs were out in the park at Versailles, where the rather chilly air was scented with boughs of horse chestnut, and the indescribable freshness of young green foliage. In the gardens of the great hôtels of Paris and in the little copses round Trianon the birds were busily prophesying summer—long golden days, and short moonlight nights.

[1] Comte de Mercy-Argenteau to the Empress Maria Theresa.

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Streams of loiterers strolled about as of yore, gazing curiously at the wide façades of the palace, for it had begun to be whispered that something was wrong with the King. One who for sixty years had played the chief part in every pageant was to do so only once more. The responsibility for half a century's misrule, ignoring the urgent needs of the people, shameless misappropriation of public funds, the setting of a most evil example—all this was about to be shifted to young shoulders, and the full fury of the storm must now break on two innocent heads. He had sown the wind—leaving others to reap the whirlwind.

The passers-by evidently realised that some event of unusual importance was pending, although it was impossible to detect any sign of sorrow, or indeed of the most ordinary regret. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast to another May-day in another country a hundred and thirty-six years later, when vast crowds waited patiently before a big grey house in a park to scan the bulletins with ever-increasing anxiety, and in the chilly dawn of the morning to read through tears that a great trust had been laid down.

Inside Versailles the usual stir of noisy routine had given place to comparative silence, to a sort of hush of expectation. Worldly faces never bear so surely the mark of their owner's lives and characters as they do at the advent of death. The Dauphin went about with red, swollen eyelids, showing an amount of feeling for his grandfather's condition that impressed even those who possessed very little themselves. Mercy reported that

in circumstances so critical and delicate the conduct of the Dauphine has been angelic,[1] and I cannot sufficiently

[1] By a curious coincidence a British ambassador used, in a private letter, six years later, the same expression about the brother as

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express my admiration of her piety, her prudence and good sense: the public is rightly enchanted at it, for Her Royal Highness has kept to the strictest seclusion even as regards the persons of which her own Service is composed. Outside the Royal Family she has only seen the Abbé de Vermond and myself, that is to say, for any time or for the purpose of holding sustained conversations. I laid before the Archduchess all that my imagination could suggest either as regards the circumstances of the moment or of the future.

The imposing *lit de parade* was still elaborately saluted by the Duc de Noailles, Prince de Soubise and the like; but its owner lay gasping the last painful breaths of life on a narrow white bed drawn up close to the windows with their half-closed gilded shutters. Those very courtiers who only yesterday had fallen over one another in their eagerness to get near the King now passed and repassed, shuddering, with averted gaze: it was almost impossible to believe that that swollen, disfigured face had ever worn the semblance of a beautiful child—of a handsome man. Did his mind travel back through vistas of years to a long forgotten past?

At his birth three lives, all less precarious than his own, divided the baby Louis from his great-grandfather's throne. Yet five and a half years only had elapsed ere the unforeseen events of three days changed the face of the situation. He could see a little boy shrinking against the brocade curtains of another state-bed within its gilded

Comte de Mercy had done in French of the sister: "Our Emperor has behaved like an angel ever since his accession, and shows such assiduity and superior talents in all the duties of his high station that his subjects and all Europe may promise themselves much good from his reign. . . . We hope . . . to be allowed to pay our court to him for the first time since the lamented death of the Empress-Queen: and I shall carry into his presence along with the good wishes of all the English nation as much personal veneration and attachment as any of his subjects" (Sir Robert Keith to Philip Yorke, Esq., January, 1781).

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balustrade in this same palace of Versailles. How frightened he had been!

"Come nearer," said a voice that he knew, very gravely; "His Majesty is trying to speak."

"You are going to be a great King," gasped the hoarse, feeble tones from behind the drawn curtains. "Do not imitate my taste for buildings nor for war. Try to relieve the people: unhappily I have not done so," the voice faltered and broke. There was silence for a very long time.

Then came whispers, hurrying feet, lights flickered on the tapestried walls, on the pale excited faces. The Duc de Bourbon crossed himself and bent his head as though he were saying his prayers; then he took the child's hand in his and led the little King of France sobbing from the room.

Soon followed another picture. Paris this time, and a boy with long brown curls standing alone on a balcony, a blue ribbon passed round the waist of his white frock, and the long ends held inside the room behind by the little orphan's "chère maman," the Duchesse de Ventadour. He was gazing wonderingly down at the sea of upturned faces, at the thousands who seemed so anxious to catch sight of him. How changed it all was when he last saw his capital!

Ah, well, he was very tired, and would put away these unprofitable memories. Madame du Barry was gone—gone to Rueil in the Duchesse d'Aiguillon's carriage. She had been hurried out of one door as the Archbishop entered by another. The dying man wandered in his mind sometimes, and muttered disconnected sentences about the nightingales singing at Luciennes. . . .[1]

Now, only the old-maid daughters remained, seated by his bedside, deaf to remonstrances,

[1] Comte Creutz.

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indifferent to every hint of danger, impervious as they had always been to reason, stubbornly determined on a sacrifice that the Duc de Liancourt, who was in waiting, said, "was not worth it, considering the object."[1] There are many roads by which heroism may be attained.

During the night of the 6th-7th the patient asked the Duc de Duras to send for the Abbé Moudoux, and, watch in hand, the princes noticed that the confession lasted sixteen minutes. When the priest had left, the penitent asked for the last rites of the Church—"to-morrow." "Not *to-morrow*," said his doctor, La Martinière, who alone among many had declined from the first to deceive the patient as to his condition, and at seven o'clock the Grand Almoner of France appeared in a procession, before which the spectators knelt. At the conclusion of the solemn service the dying King beckoned to Cardinal de la Roche-Aymon to approach, and after listening to the painful whispers the Grand Almoner turned to the audience within the death-chamber, his clear tones penetrating the ears of many of those who were waiting behind the half-closed doors:—

"Gentlemen, I am commanded by the King, who cannot speak himself, to tell you that he deeply repents his sins, and regrets any public scandal to which he may have given rise. He is determined to return to the habits of his youth, and to employ all that remains to him of life in defending the cause of religion."

At the words "repentance" and "public scandal" the King moved restlessly on his pillows.

"Monsieur le Cardinal," he muttered, "repeat those last words."

He realised that all hope was over, and asked

[1] The Duc de Liancourt's is one of the best accounts of his master's death.

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for the Dauphin; but told of the danger his grandson would incur, he placed a box into the hands of Prince de Soubise, with injunctions to give it up to no one but the new King. King George's doctor, Sutton, famous for his successful treatment in inoculations, was in Paris and was called to Versailles by his medical confrères, who refused, however, to give him access to the patient, or to administer medicines containing ingredients they had not themselves analysed. Seeing the futility of his presence, Sutton returned to Paris, but was recalled next day and offered any sum he could name to divulge the composition of his favourite remedy. He replied that a million sterling would not permit him to disclose the secret of another, but that if the King's medical attendant would swear secrecy, he, Sutton, would give him the ingredients for nothing. This was agreed to, but the quantities of the nostrum (supposed to have been James's powder, which was always made up by Sutton's own brother) excited fresh controversy, during which the British physician shook the dust of Versailles from off his feet. He had hardly reached Paris before the King died, and Sutton was ordered to quit France forthwith, on the pretext that he had publicly asserted that the last bleeding had polished off the King. This was very likely the case, and the Duke of Dorset and others inveighed against the evils of a "despotic government." This, however, did not prevent the Duke returning to France as British Ambassador directly he got the chance, where it must be confessed he did little or nothing to raise the prestige of his countrymen, or to secure the respect of the Government and Court to which he was accredited.

It is said that no less than fifty of those who crossed the long gallery at Versailles caught a contagion that proved fatal to ten of the number.

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If we realise the notions with regard to infection which prevailed here half a century ago we have little difficulty in crediting the statement.

When the Dauphin was told how dangerously ill his grandfather was, he answered:

"He will be a great loss to me: I am too young to reign."

Later on he observed to Monsieur de Maurepas, during one of their first business interviews:

"It is only three months since I was excommunicated: everybody used to be frightened when I spoke to a Minister." What a preparation for such a government!

When the King was *in extremis* it became a question what to do with the keys which a Sovereign was supposed never to relinquish until they were presented by the Foreign Minister to the new King. On this occasion they were soaked in vinegar and laid on the window-sill of the sick-chamber.

Between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, as the Cardinal pronounced the solemn words, "Proficiscere, anima christiana," the spirit of the worst King who ever reigned in France departed to render an account.

Finishing his report to the Empress within the walls of the palace itself, the Imperial ambassador alluded to scenes of wild confusion. Others say that the carriages had been standing ready since early morning, prepared for a signal to start at the shortest notice, and little more than half an hour after Louis XV. breathed his last the young Royal family set off for Choisy, where their aunts were isolated in a separate building. Count Creutz told Lady Mary Coke, with many other details already quoted, that the new King looked so ill that it was feared he also had contracted the disease. That lady, located in the Hôtel de Chartres, over-

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looking the Palais Royal, says that the weather had become beautiful and the nightingales sang in the gardens "as much as they ever did at Notting-hill"—a locality no longer associated with similar sounds. Long before the procession of coaches reached Choisy it was reported that peals of laughter were heard issuing from the one in which was seated a party of six, the eldest of whom was not twenty, and that between the drawn blinds they were seen playing at some game, presumably cards.

There was no lying-in-state: no majestic procession escorted the poor unhonoured remains to St. Denis. Some English visitors, returning from the venerable Abbey to Paris during the night, met a cavalcade on the Versailles road at ten o'clock. Drawn by eight horses were three gilt coaches each containing as many occupants, whom the spectators were unable to recognise, owing to the pace at which they were travelling. One of these equipages preceded a glass coach in which the coffin was clearly seen, lying full length across the front seat,[1] covered by a silver pall, embroidered with fleurs-de-lys. Not only were all the carriage-horses galloping, but the escort came tearing along behind, producing a strange effect, and exciting an unsympathetic if not actually hostile crowd to derisive demonstrations. Lady Mary Coke said:—

> The mob was very great and indecent; so far from showing the least concern, they whooped and halloaed as if they had been at a horse-race instead of a funeral procession. Never was a king less regretted.

Lady Mary spoke French with a very bad accent, but she probably understood it fairly well, and she was an accurate narrator: her account of this scene, as of her many experiences, is borne out by other reliable witnesses. Madame de Boufflers,

[1] Lord Strafford questioned this, and was told that the size of the coach made it quite possible.

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writing to the King of Sweden, corroborates the incident of the whooping and holloaing, which she said were cries of derision, the spectators at one or two places calling, *Ta'iaut! Ta'iaut!*—many going so far as to mimic the affected tones in which the late King used to pronounce the old cry on sighting a hunted stag. "If this is really true, it shows great cruelty; but nothing is more inhuman than the French when their indignation is roused."[1] Gustavus had reason to recollect these words later on, when, alone among the crowned heads of Europe, he did his utmost to save the lives of the King and Queen of France.

The great Palace was now deserted by all the Royal Family and their suites—the first occasion for nearly a hundred years, except for a few days at a time. Every one seems to have roamed over it pretty much as they pleased, and a party of four English visitors, Mrs. Hamilton and Lady Mary Coke, Lord Stanhope and his son, Lord Mahon, spent a long day there. The dirt and dilapidation of "the great apartment," as they called the state rooms all hung with black, were made up for by the beauty of the gardens and the warbling of innumerable birds. They admired the rooms of the old princesses on the ground floor, "so clean, so finely furnished, and so agreeably situated, looking on the gardens." Each of the three sisters possessed a library and large quantities of books. A pet cat was wandering through the silent rooms, and on its silver collar they read the name of Madame Victoire.

The chronicles of the events of the next few weeks fill many volumes. There is not one dissentient voice as to the respect inspired by the conduct of the new King—his regret for his worthless grandfather, his anxiety to do right, his

[1] *Gustave III et la Cour de France.*

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modesty and mistrust of himself. "He barricades himself with honest people," wrote Count Creutz to his master. He immersed himself in business; from early morning he granted interviews when the fear of risk from infection permitted his seeing those Ministers who had been in the room when the late King died. He wrote from three o'clock until nine at night, announcing far-reaching reforms, early retrenchments in every Government department and in every branch of expenditure, beginning with his own. He expressed deep regret at the general disorder and the low standard of public morality.

Several well-known characters, such as Mesdemoiselles du Thé and Dervieux, received a hint to efface themselves and to direct their coachmen to avoid the vicinity of the Bois de Boulogne when the Court removed from Choisy to La Muette. Numbers thronged round the young King when he walked, and it "became the fashion to drive every evening in the Bois" in the hope of meeting some at least of the Royal Family. Marie-Antoinette rode nearly every evening, "a very pretty figure on horseback and very graceful, which I can easily imagine," said Lady Mary Coke. These proceedings resembled the habits of the Emperor, who was accustomed to driving himself in the Prater in a low carriage with a pair of English horses, and a couple of servants in grey liveries behind. All this was quite unknown in connection with Royalties in France, and every one was amazed to hear that some Royal servant had signalled to the coachman of Madame de Vere to stop, whereupon the Minister's wife hurriedly descended from her carriage as the Queen rode up and "talked to her very graciously for some minutes." Madame d'Adhemar, apologising to Her Majesty for perpetually saying "Your Royal Highness,"

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received a laughing permission to "call me anything you please."

All this was pain and grief to Madame de Noailles. Who can say in the light of after knowledge that she was wrong? Mercy supported her so far, considering her best suited of all those attached to Marie-Antoinette's service "by her position and age to impress others and to repress the *penchant* to which the French are only too much addicted to put on free and easy airs."

Walking in the Bois Marie-Antoinette talked to a poor old man, upon which Madame la Comtesse complained direct to the King, the Queen having turned her back and declined to listen. But instead of supporting the lady-of-honour the King waxed wroth.

"Let the Queen be left alone, Madame," he said brusquely, "to do as she wishes, and talk to whom she pleases."

To these simpler forms La Muette lent itself as the Louvre or the Tuileries, had either been habitable, could never have done. Across the sunk-fence of the garden the young party could be seen in the cool of the evening sitting together on a bench for half an hour or more. The Queen, in deepest mourning, with her hair powdered,

the finest complexion, with the most beautiful colour; her mouth remarkably pretty when she speaks; the finest hair in the world; her figure the most noble and graceful that can be imagined; her make the most perfect; everything she says and does becomes her; her eyes have all the spirit and sense for which her family are so famous.

Lady Mary did not espy all this across the sunk-fence. It was the unanimous opinion of those French and English ladies who saw Marie-Antoinette at this time. With her on her garden seat were Comtesse de Provence and Comtesse d'Artois, "very plain"; Madame Elisabeth, "very

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pretty," and Madame Clothilde, "though so fat, with a very good face."[1] Poor things, one can picture them sitting there on those June evenings—so unconscious of the future; amused, perhaps, by the crowd, and probably not a little entertained at the aspect of poor Lady Mary herself, at whom the Queen "looked very full," apparently omitting her usual gracious recognition of a familiar face, having been warned by Mercy that the Duke of Argyll's daughter had incurred the displeasure of the Empress by mixing herself up in some squabbles at Vienna.

For the most unworthy objects the large heart of Maria Theresa held a place for pity:—

I thought it right to put in a word for that poor Barry: she (Marie-Antoinette) wrote vehemently of her, styling her "that creature."[2] The unhappy one is more to be pitied than all of us: she has lost everything, and has neither consolations nor hope in religion, which at these times is the only resource.

Meanwhile from Choisy a Queen of eighteen had been engaged in writing:—

Although I was placed by Heaven at my birth in the rank I occupy, I cannot help admiring the arrangement of Providence that has chosen me, the last of your children, for the most beautiful Kingdom in the World. I feel more than ever what I owe to my august mother, who took all that trouble and pains to establish me so well.

Being what she was, the august mother desired to be assured that all was indeed well. Her own

[1] I have often thought that no account of the mental sufferings of the survivors of the Revolution is more illuminating than a passing remark of a traveller who saw Madame Clothilde in later life at Turin. He found the Queen of Sardinia as amiable and good-natured as ever, but very pale and *grown remarkably thin*.

[2] Possibly Marie-Antoinette had heard—what certainly no one would have presumed to tell the Empress—that the "creature" had expressed her feelings in the language of her native slums when ordered from Rueil to the Abbey of Pont-aux-Dames. Once there, she employed her time in inveighing against her accommodation, in dressing up to amuse the young nuns, and in pulling bird's nests to pieces.

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letter crossed the preceding: "You are both very young: the burden is great: I am anxious, very anxious." And to Marie-Antoinette's favourite brother, Ferdinand, she wrote: "I fear this is the last of your sister's peaceful happy days."

With these prophetic words ended the early youth of Marie-Antoinette; and we leave her on the threshold of the strenuous, crowded, stirring years that followed. A tiny cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, was even now widening and darkening on the far horizon. Trivial and frivolous in prosperity, an unparalleled ordeal pierced the veneer that obscured certain essential qualities, which the two men who knew her best recognised and did justice to from the first. Alone and deserted, she showed the ascetic how to endure, and the warrior how to meet a violent death with a stern and lofty courage; and in a long martyrdom she returned to and put her whole trust and confidence in the God of her fathers, and those principles of religion which her mother had inculcated both by precept and a noble example.

Long after Maria Theresa had laid down, with statecraft and sceptre, the overwhelming burden of responsibility, Prince Kaunitz watched from Vienna the coils tightening round the unhappy Queen of France. Until then, it would have been impossible for him to foresee the measure and bitterness of the reprobation and blame that was poured forth on "the little one," on whose behalf he had taken up the cudgels in the far-away days when she was nothing more than a child.

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SOURCES OF INFORMATION

THE secret correspondence of Comte de Mercy-Argenteau with the Empress Maria Theresa[1] forms the basis of this volume, and has been dovetailed with that of Prince Kaunitz with the same Ambassador. To these have been further added the letters of the Abbé Vermond. My chief regret is that more of the latter are not available; for, written in a colloquial style by one who was as ignorant of, as he was really indifferent to, the language and customs of Courts, they are free from the unreality which the grandiloquent phrases of the stereotyped phraseology of diplomacy tends to suggest.

To attempt a complete list of the works—in and out of print—and of the published and unpublished fragments that have been utilized would be an invidious task, unproductive of satisfaction alike to the reader and to the compiler. On special topics, however, the following examples may be given:

On Versailles, to the authoritative works of the Curator (Monsieur de Nolhac) has been added *Versailles: Ce qu'il fut—ce qu'il est—ce qu'il devrait être*, by Alphonse Bertrand (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1906).

On the Duc and Duchesse de Choiseul and their friends, the many volumes of Madame du Deffand's letters, which, like the works of M. Gaston Maugras, are too widely known to require more than a passing reference—an observation which applies equally to those of M. Casimir Stryienski, whose *Mère de trois derniers Bourbons*, equally with his contribution to the excellent series edited by M. Funck Brentano, are of special utility to students.

[1] *Marie-Antoinette, Reine de France. Sa Correspondance avec Marie-Thérèse, accompagnée des rapports secrets adressés par le Comte de Mercy-Argenteau à l'Impératrice.* Ouvrage publié par M. d'Arneth, directeur des Archives Impériales de Vienne, et M. Geffroy, de l'Institut. 3 vols. in 8vo.

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On the underground diplomacy of Louis XV., *Correspondance secrète inédite de Louis XV*, by M. Boutarie, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon-Nourrit), and *Le Secret du Roi*, by Duc de Broglie (Paris, 1879), whose *Marie-Thérèse, Impératrice* has been frequently quoted.

The King of Sweden and his correspondents in France form the subject matter of a standard work by M. Geffroy, *Gustave III et la Cour de France*, 2 vols. (Paris: Firmin-Didot), and the *Comtesse d'Egmont* and the *Marie-Thérèse et Marie-Antoinette* by a member of the talented Ségur family (Comtesse d'Armaillé) contain many interesting particulars not to be found elsewhere.

It is indeed a matter for regret that the literary career of the late M. Jules Flammermont was prematurely cut short and a number of his writings destroyed by his own wish. Such of his works as are available prove the interest that would have attached to his projected exhaustive history of Louis XVI. and Marie-Antoinette.

The life of that unfortunate queen, taken as a whole, has never been so efficiently dealt with as in the *Histoire de Marie-Antoinette*, by M. Maxime de la Rocheterie (Paris: Perrin). Written in a tone of dignified good taste, from a tolerant and sympathetic point of view, and containing a wealth of valuable information representing years of study, these two admirable volumes only meet with an increasing degree of favour as time goes on. And without their assistance this book would have proved a hopeless task indeed.

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